

# The Garden of the Empty Tomb

## Luke 24:1-12

### INTRODUCTION

Philip was born with Down's syndrome. He attended the third-grade Sunday School class at his church with several other eight-year-old boys and girls. As is sometimes typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip because of his differences. But because of a very loving and creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of the group, though not fully.

One year on Easter Sunday the teacher brought in empty Leggs pantyhose containers, you know, the kind that look like large plastic eggs. Each child received one and then they were told to go outside on that lovely spring day, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the egg-like container. Back in the classroom, they would share their new-life symbols, opening the containers one by one in surprise fashion.

After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed the containers on the table. Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would ooh and ahh. Then this very creative teacher made a connection between the contents of the egg and the Easter story.

Tommy's egg contained a big rock. The children were puzzled until the teacher said "This must be the rock that covered the entrance to the tomb," which caused the children to say "I get it!" But Tommy responded, "No, it's just a rock. I didn't want to do this, so I just put in the first rock I saw." But the children liked the teacher's idea better.

Then the last egg was opened. There was nothing inside. The teacher didn't quite know what to say. The children all exclaimed, "That's stupid. That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment."

Then Philip spoke up, "That's mine," he said.

"Oh Philip, you don't ever do things right!" Megan responded with disgust in her voice. "You were supposed to fill the egg with something and there's nothing there!"

"But I did so do it," Philip insisted. "I did. It's empty. The tomb was empty!"

Silence followed. From that day on Philip became a full member of the class. The children loved him and included him in everything they did.

He died not long afterward from an infection most normal children would have shrugged off. At his funeral his entire Sunday School class of eight-year-old boys and girls marched up to his casket ... not with flowers, but with eggs. They each laid on his casket an empty pantyhose egg.

When we began this Lenten season back on Ash Wednesday, I introduced you to a special Garden – the Garden of Eden. A garden designed and built by God. A garden that God intended as a place where He and the people He created could live together in a beautiful and meaningful relationship.

- But because Adam and Eve made an intentional decision to do the very thing God told them not to do, sin entered our world.
- And with sin, all the consequences of sin, including a broken relationship with God and ultimately eternal separation from Him as well.

If that were the end of the story, our fate would be a disastrous one indeed. But in the grace and mercy of God, there is another Garden. It is the Garden of the Empty Tomb – the very garden where we find ourselves this morning.

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. (John 19:41)

Over these nearly seven weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday we have been on a journey from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of the Empty Tomb. As a part of this journey I have asked you to memorize our theme verse for this year, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

That verse is important because the story of redemption is the story of these two gardens – from Garden to Garden. Eden to the Empty Tomb. This memory verse illustrates that with the two men associated with those gardens: Adam and Jesus.

It is this truth that makes this day matter. We need an empty tomb. We don't need another garden where we can't eat the fruit. We need an empty tomb. And here is why... THREE REASONS

### **REASON #1: THE EMPTY TOMB PROVES THAT JESUS IS OUR SAVIOR**

If the tomb was not empty, then Jesus would be just another man, who like every one of us had been born into a sinful world carrying the curse of Adam. Born with a sinful nature.

People die. It's a reality of life.

A Gallup pollster was doing some research and called the coroner in a small county of Eastern Kentucky. He asked the coroner the research question on his clipboard: "What is the death rate in your county?" The coroner paused for a moment, and then responded: "Oh, I reckon it is the same as everywhere else. One per resident."

The Scriptures make it clear that death is a consequence of sin.

For the wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23)

Like it or not, everyone dies. And once we die, we stay dead. Except for Jesus. The empty tomb points to the cornerstone of the Christian faith – that is, it validates the resurrection of Jesus.

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Skeptics have tried to debunk this historical fact, but every theory they have posed has an easy rebuttal. If you want to know more about this, I invite you to talk with me. It's a fascinating subject.

You will find that all the evidence points to the authenticity of the Christian belief that the tomb was empty ... that Jesus returned to life on the third day ... that He is Who He claimed to be ... the Savior of the world. Your Savior. My Savior.

## **REASON #2: THE EMPTY TOMB IS THE PIVOTAL MOMENT WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGES**

We could talk about the far less important changes, like how the empty tomb impacted the calendar system ... from BC to AD.

But the real change is reflected in these words from Dr. E. Stanley Jones, Methodist Doctor and Missionary to India. He once wrote:

The early Christians did not say: "Look what the world has come to!" but, "Look what has come to the world." They saw not merely the ruin, but the resource for the reconstruction of that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did much more abound. On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match.

Without the resurrection, there would be no hope. Despair would rule. But in the empty tomb we find the truth of Scripture that despair is defeated and hope reigns.

A Peanuts cartoon pictured Lucy and Linus looking out the window at a steady downpour of rain. "Boy," said Lucy, "look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?"

"It will never do that," Linus replied confidently. "In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow."

You've taken a great load off my mind," said Lucy with a relieved smile. "Good theology," pontificated Linus, "has a way of doing that."

No matter what we face in this life, the empty tomb reminds us that there is hope. We do not need to despair.

### **REASON 3: THE EMPTY TOMB MEANS LIFE HAS MEANING BEYOND RIGHT NOW**

For us personally, the empty tomb means that there is more to life than this. The victory of Jesus over the grave is the fulfillment of a promise made ... A promise of new life to those who trust in Him. That promise was made as Jesus stood by the tomb of His friend Lazarus. There He said:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26)

What a promise! Because of the empty tomb, I will live eternally if I only believe in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Davon Huss created this poem to reflect that truth.

I was shocked, confused, bewildered as I entered Heaven's door,  
Not by the beauty of it all, by the lights or its décor.  
But it was the folks in heaven who made me sputter and gasp;  
the thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics, the trash.  
There stood the kid from 7th grade, who swiped my lunch money twice.  
Next to him was my old neighbor, who never said anything nice.  
Herb, who I always thought was rotting away in hell,  
was sitting pretty on cloud nine, looking incredibly well.  
I nudged Jesus, "What the deal? I would love to hear your take.  
How'd all these sinners get up here? God must've made a mistake.  
And why's everyone so quiet, so somber? Give me a clue."  
"Hush, child," said He. "They're all in shock. No one thought they'd see you."

Whoever places their faith in Jesus Christ has a home waiting in heaven. The empty tomb promises that.

### **APPLICATION**

In a village of Northern India a missionary was preaching in the marketplace. As he concluded his message, a Muslim gentleman came up and said, "Sir, you must admit we Muslims have one thing you Christians have not, and it is better than anything you have."

The missionary smiled and said, "I should be pleased to hear what it is."

The Muslim said, "You know when we go to Mecca we at least find a coffin. The body of the great prophet Mohammad is there. And we know for certainty that he lived. But when you Christians go to Jerusalem, you find nothing but an empty grave."

But the missionary just smiled and said, "That is just the difference. Mohammed is dead; Mohammed is in the coffin. All false systems of religion and philosophy are in their coffins, but Jesus Christ, whose kingdom is to include all nations and kindreds and tribes,

is not here; He is risen. And all power in heaven and on earth is given unto Him. That is our salvation."

The tomb is empty. Praise God, the tomb is empty. Shout the message loud and clear for everyone to hear.

Jesus Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed!

The tomb is empty.

Amen.