

Sermon for April 21, 2019
Easter Sunday
“How Do We Get to Easter?”

John 20:1-18

How do we get to Easter? You know getting places has changed a lot. I can remember when you had to get out a map and find the place you wanted to go and see where the roads went. Sometimes you would have to stop and ask for directions. You might get some response like, “You can’t get there from here. You have to go someplace else first,” or “when you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Nowadays they have GPS’s that tell you where to go and when to turn. Even us old school types usually go to the internet and get turn by turn directions from MapQuest.

The reason I ask how to get to Easter is that it seems some people have trouble getting there. They get sidetracked or turn the wrong way trying to get there. Somewhere they take the wrong road because they seem to miss the whole Easter message of new life in Jesus.

If you don’t believe me just listen to our Bible reading this morning. The disciples did not exactly wake up on Easter Sunday and say “He is Alive!” Mary saw the evidence and took the wrong turn to the conclusion that Jesus’ body had been stolen. Peter and John examined the evidence and took the same wrong turn. It took some spiritual GPS turn by turn guidance from angels and then Jesus to finally get Mary to the proper Easter destination. I am glad the Holy Spirit can recalculate. What do we need to do to avoid the same mistakes? How do we get to Easter?

First, you have to go through Good Friday. I know a lot of people take the bypass around Good Friday, but if you do that you will end up on the wrong road. I know Good Friday is not a pleasant place. You certainly don’t want to stay there, but you have to go through it to get to Easter. It is why Easter means what it does.

If you were here for the Cantata last week or attended the Maundy Thursday service or the Good Friday Tenebrae, then you have been through Good Friday. If you took time this week at all to contemplate the sacrifice that God made for us by sending Jesus to die, and the sacrifice that Jesus willingly made, to allow himself to be crucified, then you have been through Good Friday. Jesus had to go through Good Friday to get to Easter. He went through the middle of downtown Good Friday, through the worst neighborhoods of Good Friday to get to Easter.

Going through Good Friday is so important because the gift of Easter was bought at a price. New life is a free gift to us, but it cost God plenty. Jesus had to come and die for our sins to make new life possible. His death shows us just how much God loves us. If we forget the love of God and the cost of the gift, then Easter doesn’t mean as much to us. So, to get to Easter you have to go through Good Friday.

Mary and the other disciples went through Good Friday. Yet they still got sidetracked. Their problem was they forgot to take the Miracle Exchange. Jesus had said that he would die and on the third day rise, but they didn’t dare believe that he actually meant rise from the dead. I mean that would take a miracle of Divine proportions. So, when they saw the empty tomb, they reached the only logical conclusion, that his body must have been stolen, because they failed to take the miracle exchange, they ended up at the tomb with no access to the highway that goes to Easter.

Often people hear the Easter story of Jesus rising from the dead and they make the same mistake. They do not take the miracle exchange and they end up on the wrong road which leads to the tomb and nowhere else. They conclude that all this religious talk about Jesus rising from the dead is really all about nature coming back to life in the spring or about something else more spiritual. So, on

some level, they disregard the signs directing them toward accepting the miracle. The idea that someone would not only be brought back to life 3 days post mortem, but that they would come back with such power that they would never die again is unbelievable. It would take an act of God!

That's the point: Easter is an act of God. If you don't take the miracle exchange you can't get to Easter. If Easter is about new life, you have to accept the miracle. How can a person be so transformed that they are no longer the person they were, but a whole new creation? Death is as sure as ... well, death and taxes. How then can we live forever? It required Divine intervention, and if you don't believe in the miracle you can't accept the possibility of new abundant eternal life.

You have to take the Miracle Exchange. You have to accept that by a direct intervention of God Almighty your old life can be exchanged for a new life. That your mortal existence can be exchanged for an eternal existence. That Jesus' dead body was exchange for a living breathing eternal body. Don't miss the miracle exchange, or you will get stuck at the tomb and miss Easter.

You may still miss the destination though. You have to take on a passenger. You have to have a Jesus encounter. I know it is dangerous to pick up somebody on the road, but you know this guy. You recognize him. Even if you have never personally met him, someone you know has; otherwise you wouldn't be here today. Somebody had to tell you about Jesus at the very least.

Mary Magdalene needed to encounter Jesus to get to Easter. She was there at the tomb in the Garden weeping. Even the angels couldn't comfort her. It took Jesus calling her by name to get her on the right track.

That is why we need to have Jesus along for the ride. He can call us back to the right road. If we take a wrong turn, he can reassure us and comfort us. He can be a living presence to show us the destination. Like the old hymn says, "You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart."

Finally, once you arrive at Easter, don't forget to celebrate it! Some people seem to get to Easter then they miss the celebration. Maybe some of them took the bypass around Good Friday and so they don't realize its significance. Maybe they missed the Miracle Exchange, and got stuck at the tomb. Maybe they forgot to bring Jesus along for the ride, and lost their way. Or maybe they forgot why they made the journey.

It's like going to the fair. You know you go through the traffic and the parking and the walking and the metal detector and you stand in line and buy your ticket and then you enter the gate and just stand there. You don't go eat a turkey leg or a deep-fried snicker or ride the Ferris wheel or see the sand sculpture or the art work or the animals. It's like you forgot why you went through all that to get there.

Sometimes people come to Easter the same way. Celebrate Easter! Shout "Alleluia!" Sing at the top of your voice. Don't worry if you can't sing well. Just give glory to God.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have new and eternal life! He is alive. That's why we made this journey. He rose eternal and incorruptible. That's why we are here. He is alive – shout it with me! HE is alive! – He is ALIVE! – He IS alive!