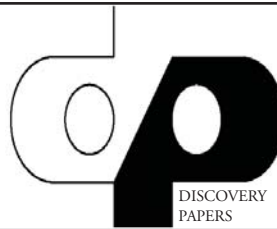


THE WORDS OF RESURRECTION

SERIES: SEVEN LAST WORDS



Catalog No. 20120408
John 20:14-16, 26-29;
21:15-17
Easter Message
Paul Taylor
April 8, 2012

Good morning and happy Easter. My name is Paul Taylor and I'm one of the pastors here at Peninsula Bible Church. It's great to have you worshipping with us on this incredible Easter morning. Welcome.

One of my least favorite things about becoming a parent was having to wake up in the middle of the night. My wife did it more than me, but I did my fair share. I could never get used to the grogginess.

Now that my kids aren't babies anymore, they don't wake up so often, but it still happens sometimes. So I started playing a game with them to make it more fun for me. After they've woken up in the middle of the night, I put them back to bed. As I'm walking them to their room, I tell them a secret word. It's usually something like "helicopter" or "armadillo." I usually have them repeat it to me, so I know that they heard it and it went into their little heads. Then when they wake up in the morning, I ask them what the word was. They usually can't remember. Learning a word when you're half asleep often doesn't carry over into being awake.

It's funny the words you remember and the words you don't remember. I've had many conversations with many different people throughout my life. I only remember the details of a handful of them. I remember some particularly painful words I've heard: like my friend in seventh grade telling me that I hurt her more than anyone in the world because I stopped talking with her so often. I remember some particularly loving words: like when a girl I really liked said "yes" to a very important question twelve years ago.

Today we are going to be talking about some very powerful words. They are the kinds of words that you remember years later. They are the kind of words that change your life.

Over the past seven weeks, we've been talking about the words that Jesus said from the cross, just before his death. We've seen some powerful things that Jesus spoke about: forgiveness, paradise, family, pain, desire, completion, and trust. Many of the deepest themes of our lives have been brought up by the words that Jesus spoke.

We spent the last seven weeks focusing on the cross because the cross is the central moment in the Christian story. But the cross is only good news because of what we celebrate today. The resurrection turns the cross from a defeat into a victory. The resurrection turns an instrument of torture and execution into something we put in our buildings and hang around our necks. Easter makes the cross a symbol of victory and a path to life rather than a symbol of defeat and the way to death.

Since we've spent the last seven weeks looking at what Jesus said just before he died, this morning we are going to look at the first few things he said just after he rose from the dead. These words were spoken to particular people with particular needs. But as we listen to them, I think we'll see how they could be spoken to us as well. Today we're looking at the words of resurrection.

We're going to look at three different interactions that Jesus had with three different people after the resurrection. We'll start by observing how Jesus spoke with Mary in the garden. These were the first words Jesus was recorded as saying after the resurrection. Jesus spoke words of comfort to Mary. We'll see how Jesus spoke with Thomas in the upper room as he gathered with the other disciples. Jesus spoke words of belief to Thomas. Finally, we'll see how Jesus spoke with Peter around a campfire at a lake over a nice breakfast of fresh fish. Jesus spoke words of purpose to Peter.

As we listen to Jesus' words of comfort, belief, and purpose, we'll hear Jesus speaking those same words to us and we'll marvel at the power of the words that Jesus spoke once he was raised from the dead. My prayer for us is that we will find comfort, belief, and purpose this morning because of Christ's resurrection.

Words of Comfort

We're going to start this morning by looking at the first words that Jesus spoke after his resurrection. These words were spoken to a woman: Mary Magdalene. Mary had a long history with Jesus. We know for sure from Luke 8:2 that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. Some people identify Mary Magdalene with Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, but that's not certain.

Mary Magdalene shows up prominently in the last days of Jesus. She is at the cross. She is at Jesus' burial. She is listed as the first witness of the resurrection. John describes how Mary went to the tomb early in the morning. When she got to the tomb, she saw that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. So she ran back to where the disciples were and told them. Peter and John ran to the tomb to figure out what was going on. When they got there, they found the tomb empty and eventually left, but Mary stayed behind.

She stayed in the garden crying. Then she looked in the tomb and was surprised to find two angels there who asked her why she was crying. She told them that someone had stolen Jesus and she didn't know where he was. Then this is what happens.

John 20:14-16:

¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

This scene is intensely dramatic. You can tell by all of the details of what happened. It's like literary slow-motion: Mary turns around. She sees Jesus standing there. She doesn't know who he is. We're not totally sure what to make of this. Several descriptions of the resurrected Jesus have people not recognizing him. At least one makes it sound like Jesus did something to prevent them from recognizing him until he wanted them to. That's possible here, or it's possible that Mary just didn't really look up at first.

The first thing Jesus says is a question: “Woman, why are you crying?” The first words of Jesus after he is raised from the dead are a question of concern for someone he cares deeply about. He knows why Mary is crying. He knows what has happened to her. After all, what has happened to her is what happened to him. His pain, death, burial, and now absence caused her to cry. But he asked her anyway. He asked her for her sake, not his.

Some of you are going through difficult things right now. Some of you need to hear Jesus asking you “why are you crying?” Some of you need to know that Jesus cares about your pain. He entered into your pain on the cross and he cares about what you are experiencing. Jesus wants

to know why you are crying.

But more than that, he wants to do something about it. Jesus doesn't just ask Mary why she is crying. Then he speaks to her. One simple word, but it opens up a powerful experience for Mary. He simply says her name, “Mary.”

Do you know that feeling when someone says your name? Have you ever been in a crowded room before with lots of conversation and you hear your name from across the room? There is something about our name when it is spoken aloud that calls out to us.

In high school, I played volleyball which remains my favorite sport to this day. But I have a rather unfortunate name for someone who enjoys playing volleyball. Typically in a volleyball practice, there are dozens of volleyballs on the court and if you're standing at the net waiting to hit or about to start a drill, you might yell across the gym in order to get a volleyball. You'd yell “ball.” So every afternoon, all throughout the practice, people would be yelling “ball” and every single time I'd turn my head, thinking they were yelling “Paul.”

We hear our name differently than other words. So after Mary explained to Jesus that she was crying because someone stole the body of her Lord, he simply said her name: “Mary.” And the spell was broken. In a moment, she recognized him. She realized that he was alive. She realized that he really is who he said he was. She realized that he beat death. She realized that God did something incredible here. In a moment, everything came together for Mary. So she responded in joy, “Teacher.” She was amazed and overjoyed that he was back.

The words that Jesus spoke to Mary were words of comfort. She grieved his death, so he comforted her. That's what some of us here need to hear; words of comfort to address whatever pain we are going through. We need to hear God saying our name. We need to know that he is with us, in the middle of whatever it is we are going through. Some of you need to hear that today. All of us need to hear it at some point in our lives. Jesus' first words after the resurrection are words of comfort. We can be comforted.

But it may not be immediately obvious how these words of comfort affect us. What does Jesus rising from the dead have to do with us at all? Just because God says our name doesn't mean that our pain is any less. What kind of comfort does this really offer us?

If you walked in here without a job, Jesus' resurrection

doesn't mean that you'll walk out of here with a job. If you walked in here feeling lonely, Jesus' resurrection doesn't mean that you'll walk out of here and never be lonely again. In short, if you walked in here in pain, you'll probably walk out of here in pain. Jesus' resurrection doesn't take our pain away. Not all the time.

But the resurrection of Jesus brings us comfort because it points to a brand new possibility for us. Jesus faced death and came out the other side. He endured incredible pain. But he won. Death couldn't keep him. Death thought he had won, but Jesus had the last word. Jesus is Lord, not only over life, but over death as well. That means that Jesus, and Jesus alone can bring an end to pain and to death.

So when Jesus says our name on the other side of death, it is an invitation. An invitation to profess along with Mary, that he is our Teacher. He is our Lord. When we follow Jesus—when we call him our Lord—we will follow him to death, but we will come out the other side. The comfort of the resurrection is that pain and death will not be the last word in our lives. What we experience now is the last-ditch efforts of a dying enemy. Jesus' resurrection comforts us in our grief.

I think it is significant that this is where Jesus starts. These are his first words. We'll see that they aren't his only words, but they are the first. We need to start by being comforted. By being assured that God is doing something in this world. When we hear Jesus say our name and grasp the significance of the resurrection, not just to the world, but to us personally, nothing in our lives will ever be the same.

Words of Belief

So Mary saw the resurrected Jesus. The gospel of John continues with the story to say that she went and told the others about him. But they didn't have to wait long to see him themselves. That same evening, he appeared to his disciples as they gathered behind locked doors out of fear of what the Jews might do when word got around that Jesus was supposedly alive again.

However, not all the disciples saw him. Thomas wasn't there that night. We don't know too much about Thomas. He doesn't appear much in the books of Matthew, Mark, or Luke. John gives us a little more information about him. John mentions him two other times when a great truth about Jesus is proclaimed.

So Thomas was with Jesus during his whole ministry. He

walked with him. He asked him questions. He followed him for three years. But the night after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, Thomas was missing. Where was he? Why didn't he get the memo? My guess is that Thomas was burned. He was disillusioned with this whole Jesus thing. He had tried it out and it hadn't really amounted to much. After a lot of initial promise, it turned out to be false hope. Thomas was disappointed with the whole thing.

So when the other disciples told him that they saw Jesus and he was alive, he wasn't willing to buy it. He'd had enough of all of this. He told them that unless he saw the nail marks in his hands, put his finger into them, and put his finger into the wound on his side, he wasn't going to believe it. He was done with following Jesus. He was done believing.

That's where we pick up the story.

John 20:26-29:

²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

This time when the disciples got together at night, Thomas was with them. He might have said he was done with Jesus but there was still something that made him come back that night to where the disciples gathered. Some of you might be able to relate to Thomas. Some of you have some serious questions about whether this whole God thing is real. Some of you may have been more passionate about your faith in the past but have lost some of that. Maybe you're disillusioned. Maybe you're disappointed with how things have turned out.

But this morning you are here. There is something that brought you here, whether it is your family or some obligation to go to church on Easter Sunday or some hope that maybe God could reignite a faith that you once had. You are here to sing and look into the Scriptures and celebrate the resurrection. You are gathered here just as Thomas was gathered with the disciples in that room behind locked doors, one week after Jesus made his first

appearance.

Can you imagine what Thomas must have felt when Jesus appeared in the room? If I were him, I'd really be hoping that everyone forgot about that thing I said a few days ago. Can we please just forget whatever stupid things I said and move on with this? But Jesus didn't let Thomas forget. He came right up to him and asked him to do every single thing that Thomas said he would have to do if he was going to believe in Jesus. Thomas listed three very specific things. Jesus came up to him and told him to do each and every one of those three things. See the nail marks. Put your finger where the nails were. Put your hand in my side.

Jesus wasn't bothered by Thomas' doubts. Imagine for a second that you are God. That isn't hard for some of us—we've been doing that our whole lives. So imagine that you are God and you created this world. What do you think about people that don't believe in you? Does it bother you?

It didn't seem to bother Jesus. He took Thomas' doubts seriously. He heard each and every challenge that Thomas had and he responded to them one by one. Jesus helped Thomas believe. He gave him what he needed so that he could have faith.

Finally, Jesus gave Thomas this invitation: "Stop doubting and believe." Stop doubting and believe. Some of us came here this morning needing to hear words of comfort. We are going through difficult things and need to hear Jesus say our name. But others of us came here this morning needing to hear words of faith. We have questions. We have doubts. We have disappointments. We need to hear something that is going to help us believe. We need words of faith. That is what Jesus offers here: words of faith. Jesus' first words invite us to be comforted. These next words invite us to believe.

Jesus wanted to help Thomas believe. He wanted to help him get over his doubts. Jesus met him where he was and invited him to go deeper. That's what Jesus does for us too. If you came in here with doubts and questions and disappointments, Jesus wants to take those seriously.

We want to be a community where it's OK to ask the hard questions. People sometimes think that doubt is the opposite of faith. But that's not true. Doubt is the opposite of certainty. Certainty is what we have when there are no unanswered questions, when everything fits into a box. Faith is what we have in the midst of questions and disappointments. Faith is what we have when we trust a

God whom we know, but we don't completely understand. Faith is asking God to help us answer our questions and meet us in our disappointments.

The resurrection gives us comfort because it means that death has been defeated. The resurrection gives us faith because it proved that Jesus is who he says he was. No one has ever risen from the dead. Except for Jesus. Everything we believe hinges on this one, singular, remarkable historical event. If it is true ... If what we celebrate this morning really is history, then we can believe.

That doesn't mean that all of our questions are answered. It doesn't mean we won't have doubts. It doesn't mean that we won't have disappointments. The life of faith is never exactly what we think it's going to be. But the resurrection does mean that Jesus is who he says he is: God in flesh come into his creation to save it.

This is how I've experienced the life of faith. It starts with putting yourself in a place where God can meet you. God shows up there and makes himself real to you. He may not answer all of your questions. I still have questions about how this whole thing works. But in the midst of my questions, I know God. And that relationship means that I can have faith in the midst of my questions. It means I can believe.

The resurrection means that the days of pain and death are coming to an end. Be comforted. The resurrection means we can believe that Jesus is who he says he is. If you are struggling with faith, put yourself in a place where God might meet you. Take your doubts to him. And when he shows up, listen to the invitation, "stop doubting and believe."

Words of Purpose

The final words that we are going to look at this morning are spoken to Peter. First Mary. Then Thomas. Now Peter. We know a lot about Peter. He is probably the most well-known disciple. He is quick to action. Quick to be courageous. Quick to be faithful. Quick to be made a fool of. The last several days before this encounter had not been good ones for Peter. Mary was dealing with grief. Thomas was dealing with disappointment. But Peter was dealing with failure.

Just before Jesus died, Peter had made one of his classic foot-in-the-mouth statements. When Jesus said that no one would be able to follow where he was going, Peter said that he would follow Jesus even unto death. Jesus corrected

him by saying that the opposite was actually true. Peter wouldn't even acknowledge knowing Jesus as he faced humiliation and torture and finally death. He would deny him three times. And Peter did.

So after Jesus died on the cross, Peter had a lot to deal with. He had to deal with the confusion and sadness of watching the man he thought would be the Messiah die. He had to deal with what would happen next. But I think the most difficult thing for Peter to deal with must have been his feeling of failure. That terrible feeling you get when you let someone you love down and you're just so ashamed of yourself.

What's so beautiful about all these encounters that Jesus has with people after the resurrection is how Jesus speaks exactly what each person needs to hear to them. By the time we get to our final passage, Peter has encountered Jesus at least twice already, perhaps more. But it seems that he hasn't really been healed. So Jesus surprises his disciples by a lake as they were fishing, tells them where to find a great haul of fish, and then enjoys a nice fish breakfast with them by the sea. Then Jesus and Peter have this conversation.

John 21:15-17:

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

This is a powerful scene between Peter and Jesus. Three times Peter had denied Jesus, three times Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to affirm his love for him. John wants to make sure we see the connection, so in verse 9, he says that this scene took place around a charcoal fire. The word for that kind of fire is only used in one place throughout the New Testament. It is used to describe the fire where Peter was warming himself when he denied Jesus.

Peter denied Jesus. Not once, but three times. He is overcome with failure. What words does Jesus speak to him? Jesus gives Peter a chance to tell him that he does love

him, even if he's failed him. And in response to each of Peter's affirmations, Jesus gives Peter a charge—a mission—a purpose. In the midst of his failure, Jesus speaks words of purpose to Peter.

Some of us are like that. In fact, all of us are like that. I've actually been feeling some of this the past few days. One of the complicated aspects of ministry is that there are almost always ways where we haven't done enough. I've had several heartfelt prayers with God over failure that I've sensed in myself. All of us have failed in some way. Some of us need to hear Jesus asking us if we love him. We need to hear Jesus asking us whether we love so that we can wrestle with that for ourselves and figure out how we'd answer him.

What would you say if Jesus asked you, "Do you truly love me?" Even though you've failed him? Even though you've not done everything you could. Do you love Jesus? We need to hear him asking us that so we can come with our answer. Do you love him?

Jesus asks this of Peter and gives Peter the opportunity to say yes, I do love you Jesus. Many of us here want that opportunity. We want the chance to say that we do love Jesus and see where that leads. What happens when we love Jesus? What does loving Jesus look like?

Jesus gave us the answer to that question when he told Peter what loving him means. Three times, after Peter assured Jesus that he loved him, Jesus told him, "Feed my sheep." Take care of those whom I love. I'll be leaving soon and I need someone to look after them. Feed my sheep. Jesus spoke words of comfort to Mary which helped in her grief. Jesus spoke words of faith to Thomas which helped his doubts. Jesus spoke words of purpose to Peter to allow him to express his love. Jesus gave Peter words of purpose and in those words we find our own purpose. Feed my sheep. Love those whom I love. Participate with me in my work. Find your purpose in Christ.

We found this over and over again as we looked at the words of Jesus on the cross. Our journey over the past seven weeks was to go deeper into the experience of Jesus' death on the cross. We wanted, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians, "To know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified." We wanted to enter into the heart of Jesus as he hung on the cross. But one of the things that we constantly found was that when we explored the heart of Jesus we found the pain of the world.

The resurrection of Jesus brings us comfort because death is defeated. The resurrection of Jesus brings us faith

because it proves Jesus is who he says he is. The resurrection of Jesus brings us purpose because it gives us someone to follow. The risen Jesus gives us a mission. He invites us along with him to participate in the grand story that he is writing in this world.

Loving Jesus doesn't mean coming to church and singing songs. That's part of it, but only a small part. Loving Jesus means that you care about what he cares about. It means you do what he does. Loving Jesus means listening patiently to difficult people. Loving Jesus means caring about injustice in the world. Loving Jesus means paying attention to the VP who is going through a nasty divorce and the crossing guard who hardly ever says a word. When we love Jesus, we feed his sheep.

If Jesus really did rise from the dead, He is worth giving your life for. He is worth following. He is worth obeying. He is worth doing crazy things with your life and proclaiming this message to anyone who will listen. The risen Jesus gives us purpose.

Finding that purpose is one of the greatest journeys of following Christ. It's different for each person. For some it is full time ministry. For some it is generous giving. For some it is overseas ministry. For some it is personal evangelism. But for all who call Jesus Lord, it is a radical life of participation in God's work in the world. Find your purpose not in success, or money, or even family. Find your purpose in Christ.

Peter has to deal with his own failure; ugly, embarrassing, shameful failure. But Jesus met him there. He met him in his failure. Just as he asked Mary why she is crying, he asked Peter whether he loved him. And he gave Peter purpose to heal his failure.

Conclusion

Each of us came here with something different. Some of us come here in grief. Some of us come here in doubt or disappointment. Some of us come here in failure. Jesus speaks different things to each of us. To some he speaks words of comfort. To some he speaks words of faith. To some he speaks words of purpose.

I started out talking about a game I play with my kids where I ask them to remember a word while they are half-

asleep. Listening to a sermon for thirty minutes sometimes puts you in the same state, so let's play the same game. This morning we've talked about three words that Jesus spoke after his resurrection. I'd like to invite you to pick one. You're not going to be asked to share it—this is just for you. But pick one of the words that might resonate in particular with you.

Are you wrestling with grief and pain? Maybe you need to be comforted. Do you have doubts or disappointments or maybe you don't believe at all? Maybe you need to be given faith. Are you full of failure and regret? Maybe you need a chance to tell Jesus you love him and to receive his words of purpose.

So whether you need comfort or faith or purpose, you can respond to Jesus this morning. If you want to put your faith in Jesus for the first time this morning or you want to pray with someone about something going on in your life, we have a team of people that will be in the west wing of our auditorium ready to pray with you. They'd love for you to let them pray with you.

He is Risen! [He is risen, indeed]

May you be comforted by the risen Jesus. May you believe in the risen Jesus. May you find your purpose in the risen Jesus. He is Risen! [He is risen, indeed]