

Luke 24:1-12 (NIV)

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Remember How He Told You (What Seemed Like Nonsense)?

The good news I want to proclaim this Easter morning is that, though there are many things Jesus taught that may seem like nonsense to our hearts, His resurrection compels us to believe that every single bit of what Jesus said is true.

This morning we’ve heard St. Luke’s telling of how it was discovered that Jesus had risen from the dead. Some women who had followed and loved Jesus go to His tomb to anoint His body with spices. And this was something that was not necessarily done for everyone, but reserved for honoring special persons. This was an honor reserved for when a special person died, but the women had been unable to do it on Friday, because by the time Jesus was buried, the sun was about to set, beginning the Jewish Sabbath. So they’d had to wait a full day to return to anoint Him, sometime early Sunday morning.

But, when they arrive at the tomb, they are stunned to find that the stone that had covered the tomb’s opening had been rolled away, and - of course - even more stunned when they enter the tomb and Jesus’ body is nowhere to be found.

Thankfully, two angels immediately appear and explain that Jesus is *risen* from the dead. In verse five, they say to the women, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”* And Luke says the women then “*remembered his words*,” as Jesus had told His followers this on multiple occasions. For example, in Mark 9 Jesus had said to His disciples, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they had not understood what He meant.

So now, in our passage, women go back to the eleven apostles and tell them about all that happened at the tomb. But verse 11 says that the apostles do “not believe the women, because their words (seem) to them like nonsense.” What seems like nonsense was that Jesus - whom days before had been put to death on a cross for all see - that this Jesus is now alive?! It’s too hard to believe, *except* we’re told that Peter get up and ran to the tomb. And, when he arrives, he finds it is as the women said. In the tomb, *he* sees the strips of linen that had wrapped Jesus’ body themselves. #

So, on Easter Sunday, Jesus’ followers are reminded of what Jesus had told them in the past, which at that time *had seemed* to them like nonsense, but had now proven to be true. And this is the thread I want to tease out from this scripture today: of when we are reminded of things Jesus said and taught that seemed like nonsense and maybe still do. Beyond predicting His own resurrection, there are so many *other* things that Jesus said and taught during His earthly ministry that may have seemed like nonsense to His followers then and may seem like nonsense to us now, or may just feel, at times, difficult

to believe. So, this morning I want to highlight three other subjects Jesus' taught about where His words *could* seem like nonsense to our minds or our hearts, and yet: His resurrection compels us to believe that *every single bit of it is true*. And these include...

1. First, Jesus' teachings about the way of living He invites us follow Him in, which differs so starkly from the ways of the world or perhaps the ways we often believe are best, and yet Jesus teaches that His is the way of true life.
2. Then, Jesus' second teaching that can be difficult to believe is that He would be actively at work in our lives - that He is actively at work *right now* in *each* of our lives - seeking to usher us more into His way of living.
3. But finally, third, what can also feel hard for us to believe - or maybe easy for us to doubt at times - is that, as followers of Jesus we need not fear life after death, because one day He will return and raise us to life everlasting.

And so, as we look briefly at each of these teachings of Christ, I would invite you to consider whether any of them are difficult to believe - or even seem like nonsense - to you. But then, I want to explain why His resurrection compels us to believe that *every single bit of it is true*. #

This morning I've included some scriptures of Jesus' teachings that I'm going to reference - at least in passing. I've already mentioned that first scripture there from Mark, where Jesus predicted his death & resurrection to His disciples, but it seemed to them like nonsense: they didn't understand. And I've even included a second example from John 2.¹

But next I have listed some of Jesus' teachings about the way of living He invites us into that is so different from the ways of the world, or perhaps ways we've become accustomed to living or handling the challenges that come our way in life. Jesus' way of living, which we might summarize as "sacrificial love", it may seem like absolute nonsense or idealistic to us, and yet He insists it is the way of true life. Indeed, He sacrificially loved us all the way to death; and yet, God the Father raised Him from the death: exalting Jesus' way of living and proving His faithfulness to those who would seek to make sacrificial love *our* way of life.

So, when it comes to some of the specifics of this way of living, I've chosen just a few excerpts from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that may *seem like nonsense* to us, such as turning the other cheek, loving our enemies, forgiving those who sin against us, and not worrying about our needs being met. For those who originally heard Jesus say these things on that mountainside, these teachings must've seemed mind-boggling: like absolute nonsense. And they can seem like nonsense to us as well. And yet, Jesus lived according to all of them, and He not only lived the most content life of anyone ever, but today we celebrate how things ended up pretty well for Him.

However, some of these teachings are more likely to seem like nonsense to us than even those who *first heard* them, and that is because living 2,000 years later, in a different culture, using a different language, we are much more likely to misunderstand what Jesus really meant with these teachings.

And an example of this is when Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek. In Matthew 5:39, He says, "do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also," and what this probably sounds like to many of us is that Jesus is calling us to be doormats to those who would do us harm; and that doesn't seem like a good way to live at all! That's some nonsense for sure! But that misunderstands what Jesus really meant. Now, I don't have the time to get into a full explanation here - I have a whole sermon about it from last August on our YouTube page² - but just a little

¹ John 2:19-22 - Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

² Video from 8/25/24 sermon: <https://youtu.be/J-0ByRUFi2U> Manuscript: https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/_files/ugd/8c239b_9638aa1f4e914331a223a53723c5fc81.pdf

summary... In ancient cultures, the right hand was considered the dominant hand, so when Jesus specifically mentions being slapped on the right cheek it implies a back-hand slap. And, in that culture he's teaching in, if someone slapped you with their back-hand it was a sign of enormous disrespect. It was a way to assert dominance over you and degrade you; it was a way to communicate, "You are lesser than me." So why does Jesus suggest we should respond by offering up the other cheek as well?

Well, because if the person took you up on it, they would have to slap you with an open hand. And, in that culture, while backhanding someone was the ultimate offense, an open-hand was how you would slap someone you considered an equal. So, what Jesus is actually teaching here is that when someone victimizes us in a degrading way - not to stoop to their level and try to degrade them right back. That's what "do not resist" means; the Greek word refers to retaliating back in the same way they treated you. So, Jesus is calling us away from the way of the world, that is "you backhand me, i'm gonna backhand you"; and He is also calling us not to be a doormat and just let someone degrade us. But He's teaching us that there is always a third way. When someone disrespects us, He's challenging us to cultivate an imagination for how we might reassert our dignity while also calling the one harming us to reconsider their action. Now, it is sacrificial - because even that open-hand slap would involve pain - but it also loves our enemy by calling them to consider whether they really *are* better than you and to instead treat you with the dignity you deserve. So, Jesus is not calling us to be doormats, and He also isn't calling us to put up with abuse, that's not what this is about - if you're being abused, get the heck out, and call the cops. This scenario is about when we feel disrespected, responding in a creative way that reasserts our dignity without retaliating in the same way they did, acting in sin.

So, this is just *one* example of ways we can often misunderstand the way of living Jesus is calling us to follow Him in. And I don't have time to even get into the others that I listed, so I provided a brief explanation of their true meaning if you haven't heard good teaching on them before and I've piqued your interest.³ But the point is that before we dismiss what Jesus teaches as being *complete nonsense*, it is important for us to understand what He actually meant, which we work really hard to do here in our teaching at St Matthias, *because - as the teaching on turn the other cheek shows - understanding what Jesus really meant makes all the difference in the world.* #

The good news is that, though there are many things Jesus taught that may seem like nonsense to our hearts, His resurrection compels us to believe that every single bit of what Jesus said is true. However, even once we grasp what Jesus really meant, this new way of living He invites us into can *still* seem to us like nonsense, because they feel so impossibly difficult to live out. And if they feel impossible, that's actually true, because they *are* impossible to live out *on our own*. For those of us who have tried to live this way in our own strength, we haven't gotten very far; and if you haven't: just give it a try and find out *just* how impossible *it is*.

And yet, that is why I wanted to talk about another subject Jesus taught on - the second of three - which is when He promised He would be actively at work in our lives - that He is actively at work *right*

³ Matthew 6:12 – [Jesus taught His disciples to pray:] "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..."

-Commentary: Forgiving someone who sins against us is something we can always do, and need to for the sake of our own spiritual health. But forgiveness simply means giving up our right to punish those who wrong us (whether aggressively or passive-aggressively). But until the one who has wronged us takes responsibility for their wrong, makes amends, and rebuilds trust, we must put a new boundary in place to prevent further abuse. In other words, forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

Matthew 6:25,33-34 – (Jesus said,) "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

-Commentary: When Jesus teaches do not worry. This can often make us feel awful about ourselves when we do worry. But Jesus is not condemning us here for feeling anxious; rather He's expressing His desire for us to not be enslaved to worry and His invitation to turn to His help to overcome it, allowing our (spiritual) hearts to learn to trust Him more and more.

now in *each* of our lives - seeking to teach us more about this new way of living and help us learn to live into it *with His help*.⁴ Of course, when we talk about Jesus being here to help us, we know Jesus is not physically here for us to see. Scripture says that forty days after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, but ten days after that He sent His Holy Spirit as He'd promised in Acts chapter 1. But, in John 16, Jesus said that it would be *good* - to our advantage - that He would go away physically,⁵ because rather than only being able to be in one place, like when He was walking around on the earth, in this age of the Spirit, Jesus is able to be with each of us, all the time, wherever we go! That's why, in John 16, Jesus said that it would be *good* for Him to go away physically.

And Jesus, then, goes on to explain that the Spirit will be here with us and be actively at work in our lives to continue teaching us *what it means & looks like* to live like Jesus amidst the challenges that come our way and also to give us the supernatural help and strength to do it - to grow in our capacity to love God and our neighbor like Jesus taught (and did).

But I wonder if this could feel like nonsense to any of us, or at least difficult to believe? It's not uncommon for us to live with a distorted image of God *not* being near to us or working for our good, but instead being distant or just waiting to punish us for missteps and mistakes. The Lord Jesus did not rise from the dead to then leave us alone and dead in our sinful ways. And here, we are seeking to learn together how to discern where Jesus *is* at work in each of our lives and where He wants to help us take a step forward. And, I know so many (here) have discovered this to life-changing effect. But if (any of) this feels like nonsense to you - like news of Jesus' resurrection felt like to the eleven apostles in our gospel today - maybe you could still respond somewhat like Peter did? Peter was struggling to believe, but he still ran to the tomb to find out... if perhaps the unbelievable *could* be true. Perhaps we could ask God - even now - to show us where He *is* at work in our lives. We are at church after all! In the quiet of our hearts, would we have the courage to ask the Lord where He is inviting us to take a new step to trust Him, or maybe there is an area of our lives where we are frustrated or overwhelmed where we could ask for His guidance and help? >(And I'd like to give just a moment for those who would like to do that.)< #

The good news is that, though there are many things Jesus taught that may seem like nonsense to our hearts, His resurrection compels us to believe that every single bit of what Jesus said is true. And this leads us (right in) to a final subject where Jesus taught a definitive truth that could still seem like nonsense, or hard for us to believe or can just be easy for us to doubt at times. And that's Jesus' promise of everlasting life after death for all of us who follow Him in this life. In the final scripture I listed, from John 11,⁶ in the aftermath of His friend Lazarus' death, Jesus famously said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Indeed, even though Jesus elsewhere seemed to promise we would be with God spiritually *until* Jesus returns, many don't understand that scripture's teaching is that our everlasting life with Him will be with physical-but-transformed bodies. This is what the end of the Nicene Creed we just read affirms: we believe "in the (future) resurrection of (*our own*) bodies - And Jesus' resurrected body gives us a glimpse - a sense - of what that will be like. But scripture further teaches that the Lord will then re-make our entire cosmos into a new heavens and new

⁴ Acts 1:3-5 – After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁵ John 16:7&13a – (Jesus said,) "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you... (And) when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..." [ESV]

⁶ John 11:24-26 – Martha answered, "I know (my brother) will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

earth where we will live with Him; in our resurrected bodies, we will live with Him forever. To many this may seem difficult to believe, but if God miraculously took on flesh and then miraculously rose from the dead, there's no reason to doubt He wouldn't have one more reality-changing miracle up His sleeve.

But for those times when we may doubt that this promise of everlasting life after death can really be believed, such as when we're grieving the death of a loved one or even when contemplating our own death, let's remember the resurrection and Jesus' disciples: that Jesus had made a promise *to them about that* that had seemed so hard to believe, and yet today we celebrate that Jesus' words nonetheless proved to be absolutely and miraculously true. The good news is that, though there are many things Jesus taught that may seem like nonsense to our hearts, His resurrection compels us to believe that every single bit of what Jesus said is true.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.