**Sermon 4/21/19**

**Luke 24:1-12**

It was shortly before Spring Break at Western Kentucky College.

The students were gathering in the classroom

          and chatting about their plans during the holiday.

One of the students asked the professor what he was doing over Easter.

The Professor answered, "I am not doing anything special.

         The Easter story is nothing but a myth.

         There is no God, and there is no way a person rises from the dead!"

A female student who normally was very quiet, spoke up,

         “Sir, I not only believe in God, I believe in the resurrection.”

The professor replied, "You can believe whatever you wish.

However, the real world excludes the possibility of miracles such as the resurrection.

It is a scientific impossibility.

No one who believes in miracles can respect science."

To prove his point the professor went to the refrigerator

              where he kept all the lab experiments, and pulled out a raw egg.

He stood by his desk and said to the young student:

              "I am going to drop this egg on the floor.

             Science will prove that gravity will pull it to the floor and the egg will break.

             Now I give you a challenge in your so-called faith.

            I want you to say a prayer right now and ask the God you believe in,

                      to keep this egg from breaking when it hits the floor.

            If God can break the rules of science then you'll have proven your point.

            If not, I will have proven my point."

         The shy girl stood up and began to pray:

"Heavenly Father, I pray that when my professor drops the egg,

           you will prove that you gave us science,

           and make this egg break into a hundred pieces.

Dear Lord, I also pray that when the egg does break,

          my professor will have a heart attack and die.     Amen"

There was immediate and absolute silence in the room.

Nobody laughed. Nobody said a word.

For several long moments the professor did absolutely nothing.

He stared at the girl. Then he stared at the egg in his hand.

Without a word he carefully put the egg back into the refrigerator.

He turned to the students and said with great annoyance, "Class dismissed!"

Apparently the professor believed in God's existence more than he thought,

           because he was not willing to bet his life that God did not exist.

Atheists seem to have a lot of trouble holding on to their disbelief.

They have to keep arguing about the impossibility of Christianity, Jesus, and God.

It is as if they have to keep convincing themselves, over and over,

          that God does not exist.

Why and how did Christianity arise, and spread throughout the world?

Through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Nowhere did Churches come into existence without that solid foundation –

                 the Resurrection of Jesus.

Wolfhart Pannenberg was a German theologian.

             In a magazine interview he was discussing the resurrection and he said:

"The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question

             it except for two things:

First, it is a very unusual, unexpected, and difficult to believe, event.

And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

What difference does Easter make?

What changed at Easter?

People changed. Their belief changed. The way they lived changed.

Like the first disciples,

          our greatest need is not just to see or hear about the resurrection,

          but to have the resurrection happen to us, every day.

The tomb was empty.

And those frightened, defeated disciples became fearless, adventurous missionaries,

          spreading the good news throughout the world, establishing churches,

         healing people, teaching a new way of living – God's way of life and love.

Does Easter make a difference?

Did the resurrection of Jesus matter? Did it change anything?

To find the answer, simply look around you,

The greatest proof for the truth of Christ and the reality of his resurrection

         is found in the changed lives of Christians.

Hardened criminals have been touched by the message of Jesus Christ

        and their hearts have been turned toward good,

        in a way that no amount of rehabilitation could have accomplished.

Ardent followers of radical belief systems have turned from being violent,

          brutal terrorists, to becoming loving, caring, followers of Jesus Christ.

Look at the nations where the Gospel, banned and silenced by governments,

         has nevertheless conquered the hearts and minds of the people,

         and inspired them to a whole new way of living.

People in many countries have risked their lives to attend worship,

          or to gather together for Bible study, and prayer.

In the middle of the twentieth century, after destroying all of the

          Christian seminary libraries in the country,

          Chairman Mao declared Christianity had been permanently

           removed from China, never to make a return.

Yet the faith continued to grow, and churches continue to be built.

And the Gospel continues to spread.

Hospitals and schools have been built by Christians throughout the world.

Food and medicines continue to be donated in needy places.

Lives continue to be changed.

From large projects, to tiny acts of kindness and forgiveness,

            people's lives continue to be changed.

People in horrible circumstances, and in total despair,

            have found hope, and peace, and even joy.

The power of Easter is not simply a one-time event.

It is an everyday occurrence as we allow the love of God

            to open our hearts and minds to the miracle and the mystery

            of the Resurrection of Jesus.

In 1930 a Russian Communist leader named Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin

           was sent from Moscow to Kiev to address an anti-God rally.

He was one of the most powerful men on earth at the time.

His purpose was to address a huge assembly on the subject of Atheism.

For an hour, he abused and ridiculed the Christian faith,

          until it seemed as if the whole structure of belief was in ruins.

As he addressed the crowd he hurled insults, and offered what seemed intelligent

arguments, against God, Christianity, and the Resurrection.

An hour later he looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of faith.

In gruff tones which would scare the bravest of people,

he asked, "Are there any questions?"

Deafening silence filled the auditorium.

But then, one man approached the platform,

          and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader.

He surveyed the crowd from left to right, and then from right to left.

After several long and silent moments,

           he quietly but firmly stated the ancient greeting known well in the Church:

          “Christ is Risen!”

As one, the entire crowd arose to their feet.

And the response came crashing like the sound of thunder:

           “He is Risen, Indeed!”

The arguments could not destroy their faith.

Abuse and ridicule, even pain and death, could not destroy the belief of the people.

And Christianity spread throughout the world.

Listen to the message of the angel: "He is not here, He has risen!"

The Resurrection is not the end, but the beginning of New Life.

And it makes all the difference in our lives,

          and throughout the world.

AMEN