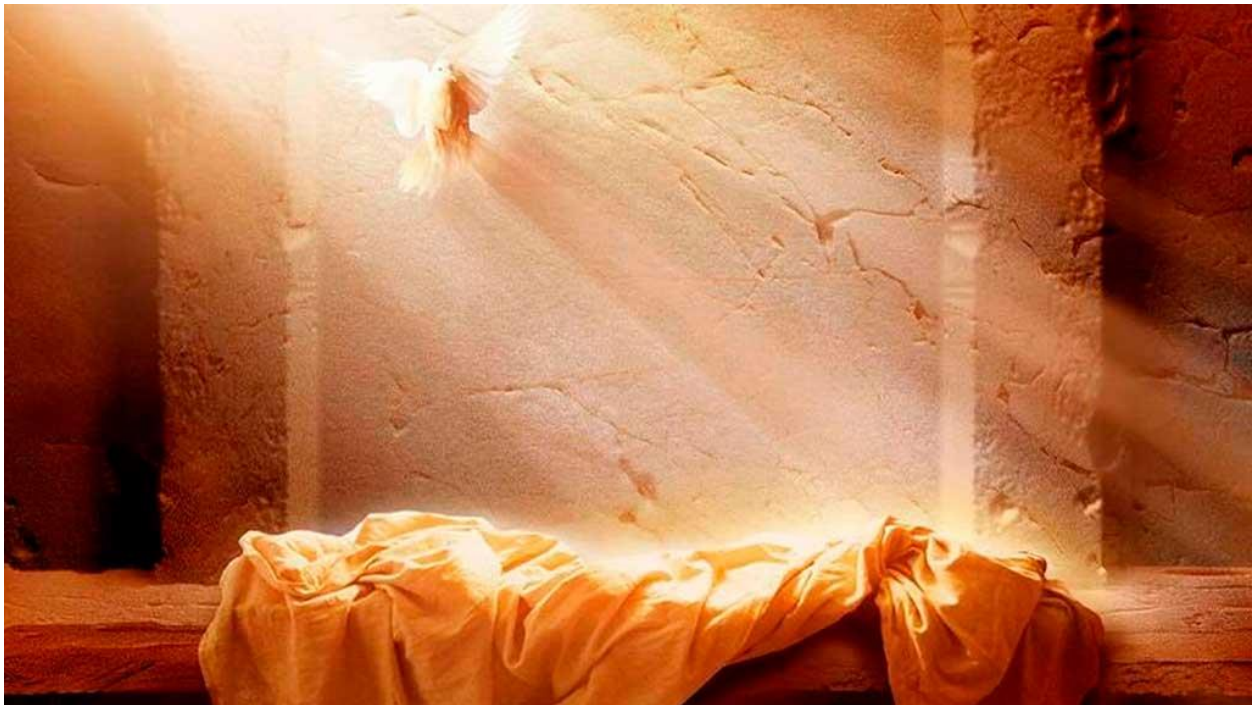


# **Sermon, Easter 2022**

## **1 Corinthians 15:19-26 & Luke 24:1-12**

### **“Face to Face: Is it Possible?”**

#### **Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



I had an opportunity to talk to someone a few weeks ago who is really just starting out in their career. And they were just incredibly stressed out about, well, everything. And one of the things they were stressed out about was the idea of success, they wanted to be successful. As we talked, I discovered that their definition of success was doing everything right, perfectly in their job. And I said to them “you know, success is a great thing. Everyone wants to be successful. But perhaps you might want to not change your desire for success but your definition of what it means to be successful in life. Because sometimes the things we look at in life that we might deem as being, if not failures at least a nonsuccess, often are the beginning of our greatest achievements.”

Look at our example from last week. If you remember we talked about John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement and what would eventually become the United Methodist Church. Many historians believe that it was the Methodist movement and revival that kept Great Britain from experiencing a revolution as we saw in the US colonies and in France at the same time. All because he had to go through a failure as a missionary before his life could be changed. It's often that way with missionaries. Often what

they perceive as failures are the beginnings of great success by God. It's all in how we define what it means to be successful.

Look at the life of Jim Elliott, for example. Jim Elliot and others were led to begin a mission to reach the Auca tribe in the Amazon basin. The Auca were well known for violence and for head hunting. None had been able to penetrate their society with the Good News of Jesus. Eliot and his friends, all in the mid to late twenties, I believe, were undeterred, they felt God's call. For weeks, they flew over them dropping notes and some supplies to become friendly with the people and let them know they meant them no harm. Finally after months of preparation, they land in their plane to meet the Auca. A group of Auca run out and killed every single one of them.

That's an incredibly tragic tale, and might have gone down as simply a cautionary tale except for what happened a few years later. Elliot's wife, Elizabeth, and the families of the other martyred missionaries came to live among the Auca. They had never experienced anything like this before. Instead of anger and revenge, they brought them forgiveness, love, and Grace. That tribe would eventually become almost 100 percent Christian. Sometimes failures can lead to the greatest success.

But why? Why were the widows and families successful where these missionaries were not? Because what changes someone's life is not pamphlets, arguments, or even supplies. What truly changes someone's life is a face to face encounter with Jesus. That's what changes their lives. They met Jesus in the faces and lives of these people who were willing to forgive them and love them despite what they had done to their husbands. It was the face to face encounter with Jesus in the end that changed their lives.

A face to face encounter with Jesus makes all the difference in the world. In fact, we will begin a new series of messages this week as we look at what happens to us when we go face to face, one on one, with Jesus. How can coming into His presence, experiencing an intimacy with God, change who we are? I want to encourage you to join us over the next several weeks as we explore this together.

But what difference does it make to have a face to face encounter with Jesus? Well, let's go back to our Scripture from the Gospel of Luke. This is, in part, Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus. But the particular passage we read is interesting because Jesus doesn't actually appear. Now, all the evidence is here. The stone has been rolled away, Jesus is gone. And they get to experience two angelic beings telling them Jesus is alive. And what do they do? They immediately go to the disciples, the people who honestly should be expecting this, and they tell them all they have witnessed, the stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, Angels saying Jesus has risen, a reminder from Jesus own words.

But the disciples simply can't believe. It's too much, it's too good to be true, they can't accept that it might be possible for Jesus to have returned.

Hay, don't they believe? They will not believe until Jesus later comes in the room with them. You see, they need Jesus, they need an encounter with Jesus in order to fully believe. It's only a one on one full encounter with Jesus that will change the lives of the disciples, change the lives of a tribe in Ecuador, and can change your life, as well.

Have you had a face to face encounter with Jesus? Do you come to church, have you heard the stories, have you read the Bible, all which is absolutely critical. But you can do all of that and not have a face to face encounter with the risen Lord. Have you come into His presence?

We might well ask, what difference could it possibly make that I have a one on one encounter with Jesus, that I actually come face to face with Him? In our other Scripture, Paul says, why, it makes all the difference in the world. If Jesus rose from the dead, you can have an encounter with Him; why, it changes everything. It's the game changer of all game changers. Paul says when we encounter Jesus, because He has risen from the dead, everything in life can be made new, the old man, the old Adam, as Paul says, all of our old life, our old circumstances can be done away with, and our entire lives can be made new. Paul, of course, knows exactly what he is talking about, an encounter turned Paul from someone swearing to kill every Christian he meets into the greatest missionary and evangelist the world has ever known. It turned John Wesley from a failed missionary to someone who created a move that saves a nation and still changes us today, it changed a village of people whose name literally meant *the savages* into a people filled with Grace and love.

If a face to face encounter with Jesus can do all of that, can you imagine what He might do in your life? What is it in your life you need to pass away so that your life could be made new? Some of us here today are haunted by old fears. Jesus can take the fears in you away and replace them with His peace. Some have come today with the shrouds of loss and grief around them. Jesus says "let me take your grief, take your sorrow, and give you a new life, come and experience resurrection and hope.

Some of you have come today and you give up. Oh, you still function, you go from day to day, but you've given up. Your life is marked by what you perceive as failure. And you have just really given up on the idea you can be happy or that you can enjoy life or that you will ever do anything of significance.

We want you to know that when you encounter the living God who could overcome death and leave the tomb, that He can breathe His spirit over your life. He can breathe His spirit across even your failures and make something beautiful out of them. He can bring them to life, you can see life in a new way. You don't have to go through life. You can live. Your hearts that have grown cold can be made warm again, be made to love again. Relationships can be restored. There is nothing a God who has broken the power of sin and death in your life can't do for you.

But you have to meet Him face to face. A God you hear about, read about, will never actually change your life. You need to have a one on one encounter and come into the presence of Jesus. And it can happen today. All you have to do is ask, and Christ will come to your life, He will begin to breathe the hope and new spirit across everything in your life. All you have to do is ask Him to come into your life in an entirely new way. He changed the life of Paul. He changed 11 frightened disciples hiding out in a room in Jerusalem. He changed an entire village. What can He do when you let Him into your life? Amen.