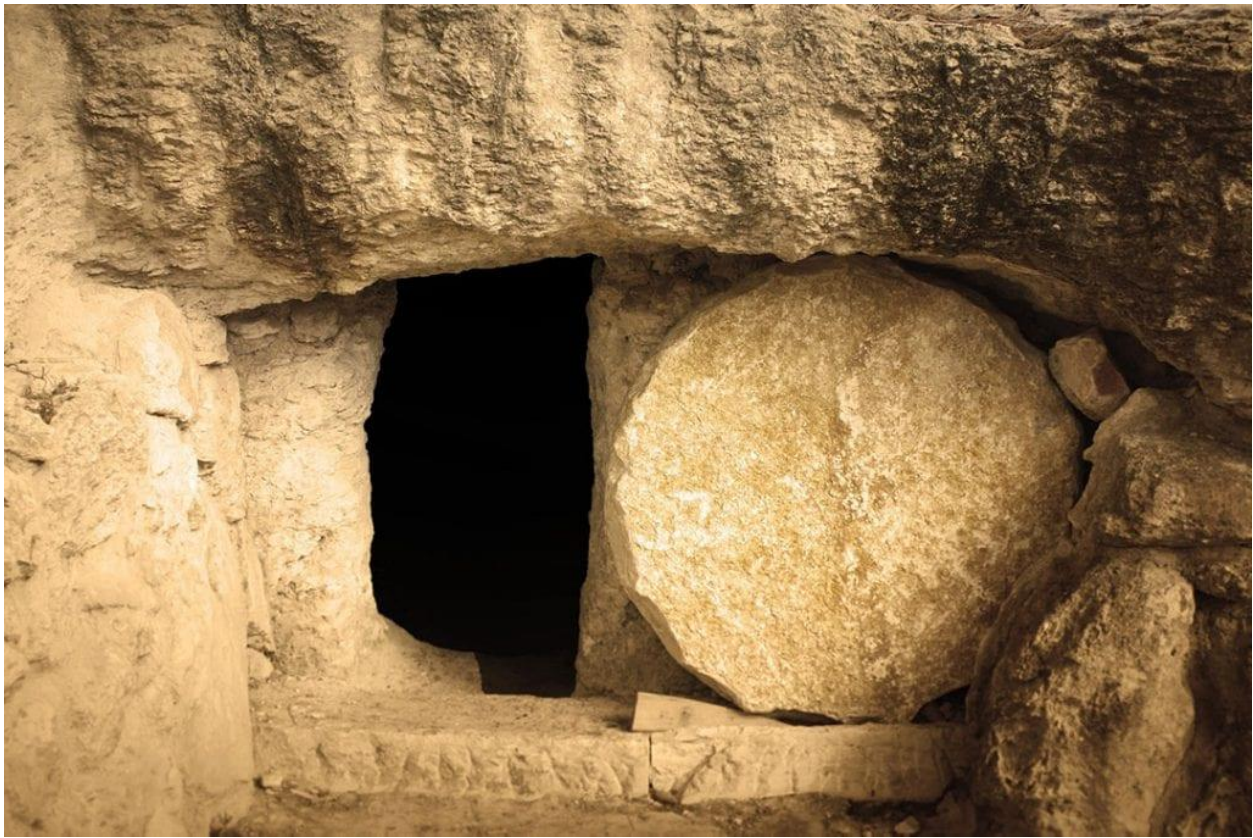


Sermon, Easter 2023
Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10
“Living Your Best Life Starts Today”
Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor



This past week, I went up to Columbus to work out with some friends of mine. Something I've done for years but had to lay off as I recovered from surgery. Now we usually finish pretty late, and so I'm in the habit of pulling through a fast food restaurant and grabbing something quick on the way home. And I usually stop at the same place.

Now, as this story progresses, I'm not going to give you the name of the establishment. But I stop there for a couple of reasons. One is that I know what I like on their menu so I don't have to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what I want. Two, it's convenient, it's on my side of the road; I can pull in, get my food, pull back out, and I'm back on the road headed home. Third, I'm a creature of habit. I don't mind having a routine like that. In fact, there is part of my personality that likes it.

But the reason I go there is, in the end, for none of those reasons. I go there for the adventure. The adventure that you never know what they are going to have. I can't tell you how many times I've gone there and they are out of whatever I had already decided I wanted to eat. And it used to make me mad to get in line only to discover they would be out of what I wanted. Because it wasn't anything odd. It was the stuff they normally sold. How are you out of that? Now, I would never say that to them.

So, it's become a bit of a game. Did I guess what they had? Did I miss again? Because every now and then, you get it right, and they have whatever you ordered. It's like going to Vegas and gambling. You know you aren't going to win, but on that every now and then chance you do, it's addictive. It's become a game. And it's not a big deal because there are other places to go. My wife will laugh at me when I say well, I stopped at this place. She just shakes her head at me.

But the other night was the best. I pulled in and I ordered a very common meal. I pull up and the guy at the speaker is very pleasant, *welcome to blank, what would you like?* And I ordered. And I hear this *sir, I'm sorry to tell you this, but we are out of,* and then he sighed. He actually sighed. And this is what he said: *we are currently out of burgers, chicken, fries, potatoes, bacon, cheese, coke, diet coke,* he paused, *well, actually we're out of all flavors of coke. All I can offer you is a parmesan salad.*

So, I finally had to say, and I'm laughing. I said "hey, I know this is not your fault, but I have to ask. How is it you're out of stuff so often? Like almost every time I am here, you are out of something?" He sighs again, *I know. But if it helps, the guy who orders our stuff got fired this morning, so it will be better. Can I offer you a free cookie?*

As I was leaving, it occurred to me how my attitude had changed from being angry and really frustrated that this place never seemed to get their act together to laughing about it. And I realized what it was. I have become accustomed to being disappointed by them. I assume they are going to disappoint me, and so I've become used to it, a bit calloused to it, if you will. I had become accustomed to being disappointed.

Obviously, being disappointed at a fast food place is not that big a deal in the grand scheme of things. But how many of us live our life that way? How many of us live our life assuming that life is going to disappoint us? How many of us go through life assuming that life is not going to get any better? How many of us assume people will disappoint us, life is not going to be good, anxiety will always be high, depression is around the corner, work is going to go bad, relationships aren't going to measure up, and I'm going to mess up over and over again. Life is going to disappoint me, and I am going to disappoint those around me? We can get so accustomed to it that when the things do go well, it surprises us or we can't enjoy it because we are waiting for the other shoe to drop.

We are at the end of a series we called Living Your Best Life. So that begs a question, doesn't it? How can we live our best life if life is only going to disappoint us? Can this be the best life when life and others let us down and we let others and ourselves, and God down over and over again?

I want to go back to our Gospel lesson this morning because I don't know if there is any more tragic story up to this point than the life of Jesus and His followers. A good man going around with no agenda other than telling people God loves them and they should love others, helped people get better. He cared for people that others did not care for. He helped the poor; He challenged the religious political leaders. And so, what happens to Jesus is not surprising. One friend betrays Him, one friend denies Him, the others runs away. The political machine arrests Him, beats Him, and executes Him. One wonders how can we be disappointed? This is life, isn't it? Someone gives you hope, and they are taken away. We really ought not be surprised.

Up to this point, perhaps the story of Jesus is not unique, just one more disappointment in life. But this morning is different. That first morning, we witness something so incredible that it changes everything. The tomb of Jesus is empty. Let me say it again, Jesus rose from the dead. My friends, let's be unequivocally clear. We are Christians not because of the teachings of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus are hard and go against a lot of our basic instincts. Hedonism we can get out minds around. Do whatever gives you pleasure. But turn the other cheek, take up your cross? No, I am not a Christian because of the teachings, or because of its philosophies which are hard. I am not a Christian because I have weighed it against all religions and it works the best. No, I am a Christian because the grave of Jesus is empty and He rose from the dead. How do we know the virgin birth story is true? Because He rose from the dead. How do I know God has a place for me in heaven? Because He rose from the dead? How do I know the meek shall inherit the earth? Because Jesus rose from dead. How do I know that life does not have to be one disappointment after another? Because Jesus rose from the dead.

The empty tomb changes everything, and it can change you. Why, look at what happens here. Two women come to the grave grieving, beside themselves. They leave full of awe and joy. Why? Because the grave is empty, they become the first evangelists, go and tell the others.

These women and the disciples are full of fear and hiding, but now they are told not to be afraid? Why? Because Jesus is alive, the tomb is empty, and Jesus will go with them, before them, no matter where they go.

The risen Jesus turns Peter from someone willing to deny Jesus into someone willing to die for the truth of the resurrection. The risen Jesus takes the other ten, all hiding, all afraid, and turns them into the most powerful movement the world has ever seen. Oh, is there anything this Jesus risen Son of God cannot do?

I want you to know you can live your best life today. Because Jesus is alive, and He will overcome your disappointments. He can turn your fear into courage. He can take your anxiety and turn it into peace. He can take your bitterness and turn it into forgiveness. He can take your sin and turn it into righteousness. He can take your brokenness and turn it into healing and wholeness.

My dear friends, you do not have to go through life disappointed. We titled this sermon "Your Best Life Starts Today" for a reason. The grave of Jesus is still empty. Death could not hold Him. The grave could not corrupt Him. Satan couldn't contain Him. The Son of God lives. And He can change your life if you will meet Him. He will go before you in all things. Your life can be changed. It's our prayer this morning that you will, like those women, come face to face with Jesus before your lives today. And that you will go in a life that doesn't disappoint. Amen.