

Surprised by Jesus

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[0:00] Jesus said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, surprises can be good or bad, can't they?

Had to replace the transmission in my van a couple weeks ago. That was a nasty surprise. But even the best of surprises can shock or startle us a little bit.

A good surprise can unsettle us in ways that we don't expect. Because we like to think that we have it all figured out, and sometimes our assumptions just get turned right on their heads. Now, as I thought about this, strangely enough, the classic children's toy, the jack-in-the-box, came to mind. Everyone know what I mean by that? Yeah. Now, these things seem to have been designed to torment children and traumatize them for life. Yet, they keep getting made, and children keep playing with them.

[1:33] Now, when Mia was really tiny, she had a jack-in-the-box that featured the classic children's character, Curious George. You know, the curious monkey. So, you'd wind the thing, music would play, suddenly a stuffed monkey would spring out of it.

Now, we were taking a video of Mia and I playing with this thing one day. We captured it for posterity, I suppose.

I'm winding the box, the music is playing, and Mia's bobbing her head along in time to the music. And then, Curious George springs out of the box. She's startled at first. Then she reaches out to grab him and says, Oh! Oh, snap!

Yep. She's like two at the time. The surprise there shocked and delighted her. That's a common reaction, I think, to a good surprise.

I think it's fair to say that the disciples were both shocked and delighted by the resurrection of the Lord. The death and resurrection of Jesus are surprising things.

[2:37] They turn our assumptions completely upside down. The two on the road to Emmaus encountered this surprising reality. And then they have it revealed to them in a surprising way.

In so many ways, Jesus surprises us. Now, we see when we look at our Gospel passage that it surprises the two on the road to Emmaus.

That the one they thought that they had hoped would be the Savior of Israel would suffer and die. Surprises them that someone really could rise from the dead.

They're not expecting that. It seems to surprise them that they only recognized the risen Jesus for who he was. After one, he opened the Scriptures with them and explained the Gospel to them. And then broke bread with them. Now, if we're being honest, I think these things surprise us as well. Let's think about that this morning. And if you have your Bibles, look with me in our Gospel text, Luke chapter 24.

[3:44] Now, let's think about that first surprise for a minute. That the one these disciples were hoping would be the Savior suffered and died. Was crucified.

Was betrayed by the religious authorities of his own people. And killed by a pagan empire. Now, we can see their surprise. We can see their disappointment in their words to Jesus as he's walking with them incognito, if you will.

Let's look. Starting in verse 17. He said to them, What is this conversation that you're holding with each other as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, A man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before the Lord and all the people. How our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

[4:50] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. You can practically hear their disappointment in those words, can't you?

He was a mighty prophet. We had hoped he would be the one to save us. But he was condemned and crucified. Doubtless they were certain that it wasn't supposed to be that way.

Can you really blame them? I mean, isn't it a surprising thing that a righteous, mighty prophet would be handed over and killed in the most humiliating way possible?

The idea that someone who was beaten and nailed to a cross could save people from anything is a radical idea.

See, Jesus was not the kind of Savior that they were expecting. He surprised them. Now, it's likely that they were expecting a leader, a Savior, who would drive out the Roman occupiers and restore the glory of Israel.

[5:56] Instead, Jesus got turned over to the Romans and crucified by them. That's an uncomfortable thing. The view of Jesus that is, as he's generally seen in Islam, seems to pick up on that discomfort.

Now, in Islam, Jesus is regarded as a prophet, but not the Son of God, not God incarnate. For the most part, though, Islam teaches that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross.

And there are various arguments they try to use to explain that. But the basic conclusion is this. It is horrifying to think that God's prophet could be killed in such a shameful manner.

Now, what about those of us Christian believers who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who is God incarnate? Isn't it a shock to think that the Son of God, through whom everything was created, could take on human flesh and die?

The two on the road to Emmaus got the shock. It seems that they couldn't believe that the one who was to be the Savior could also be crucified.

[7:09] But what does Jesus show them when he explains the Scriptures to them? He explains that the Christ had to suffer. Because he had to be perfectly obedient, even unto death on the cross.

Because he is a Savior who saves his people from a burden that is so much greater than Roman occupation. As awful as that might have been. He is a Savior who saves his people from the guilt and the power of sin.

This Savior, they didn't realize it, but he came to be a substitute for sinners. He came to give his life so that we might live. He came to carry the burdens of our sin on his very shoulders.

So what do the Scriptures say about him? What does Moses, what do the prophets say? Well, let's look at the prophets. We read in Isaiah 53. He was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

[8:13] We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. In the context of salvation history, let's look at it this way.

We were in trouble. We failed to give God the obedience that we owe him as his preachers. We've sinned, and as the Bible tells us, the wages of sin is death. And that's a pretty hopeless place to be because justice would demand that we die.

Because we have a debt that we cannot pay. So what did the Savior do? He paid the debt of obedience perfectly on our behalf.

He obeyed even unto death. He died taking the curse that we deserve for our sins. See, at the end of the day, he took on and triumphed over something far greater than the Roman army.

Far greater than Caesar. He triumphed over the guilt of sin for all who put their trust in him. So that we have peace with God.

[9:18] And have been washed clean in his blood and we are set free. Isn't that surprising? Isn't that shocking?

That God himself would take on human flesh to save rebels like us from the mess that we created for ourselves. And that he'd do it by dying for us.

I think it's safe to say that the disciples on the road to Emmaus weren't expecting it. Surprising? Absolutely.

Amazing. Absolutely. It's no wonder that the Apostle Paul says, though, that the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Who would have guessed that God would have acted in that way?

The Anglican theologian Richard Hooker put it this way. And please pardon the 16th century language. He was old school. The Apostle saith, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

[10:21] 2 Corinthians 5:21 Such we are in the sight of God, as is the very Son of God himself. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, or whatsoever.

It is our wisdom and our comfort. We care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned and God hath suffered, that God hath made himself the sin of men, and that men are made the righteousness of God.

That is what our crucified Savior did for us. Because Jesus died for us, when the Father looks at us, he sees the perfect righteousness of his Son.

That is our wisdom and our comfort. To those who are being saved, it is the very power of God. It's the wisdom of God. Now that surprise is closely linked with another amazing surprise.

Jesus actually rose from the dead. You can see that Cleopas and his companion are pretty skeptical about that. They say, Some women of our company amazed us.

[11:33] They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.

They're sad, they're confused, they don't know what to think about all of this. And can you really blame them? It is a radical claim on which our faith is founded, that Jesus really rose from the dead. That is a tough one for us to wrap our minds around, because it is so far removed from our daily experience. I have never seen someone rise from the dead with my own eyes. I'm guessing you probably haven't either.

People assume, from their experience, that when a person is dead, he stays dead. But our whole faith hinges on the resurrection of Jesus.

Here is an idea that comes under fire in the skeptical, secular, materialist world that we're living in here in the West.

[12:42] Now, I once saw a cartoon parody from a Christian site that featured a parody of the biologist and militant atheist Richard Dawkins.

Do you know Richard Dawkins? Mark, I see you nodding. You probably know where I'm going with this, don't you? Now, the parody had Dawkins saying this. People can't rise from the dead, because if people could rise from the dead, people would rise from the dead.

Now, those in the cartoon, those who were challenging Dawkins, who happened to be a couple of simple Irish peasants from the first millennium, rightly pointed out that that was why it was kind of a big deal when Jesus rose from the dead.

Now, to put that argument against the resurrection another way, it's kind of like arguing that miracles can't happen because miracles can't happen.

The logic there is a little bit circular. But here's the thing. When there is a sovereign God who loves us in the picture, what seems impossible to us becomes reality.

[13:55] Because the truth is this. Jesus really did rise. Jesus really did appear to many witnesses. Jesus really did ascend into heaven and really is reigning in glory.

And those witnesses really did go out into the whole world preaching the message that they had witnessed with their own eyes to everyone who would listen and to plenty of people who weren't willing to listen.

They gave their lives because they were unwilling to renounce what they had seen with their own eyes because they knew that it was more important than life itself. And of course, disciples are still risking their lives to share that message.

We'll be having one of them as our guest preacher next Sunday. The Christ, Jesus tells the disciples on the road to Emmaus, really did have to suffer to die, to rise again.

He had to die and rise again to defeat and destroy death forever. To rise again so that everyone who believes in Him will never perish. The resurrection of Jesus surprises us because it turns the world as we know it upside down.

[15:05] And thank God that it does. Now there is a third surprise in the account of the encounter on the road to Emmaus that I want us to consider this morning.

Think for a second about how Jesus reveals Himself to them. Now, if this were like the Hollywood blockbuster version of this scene, there would be epic synthesizer music at that moment.

There would be bright flashing lights. It would be over the top if the entrance of someone who rose from the dead happened as we expected it. But what does Jesus do with these two?

One, He digs into the Scriptures to proclaim the Gospel to them. Two, He breaks bread with them. And then they recognize Him.

He proclaims the Gospel to them from the Scriptures. Then He breaks bread with them. Now, it is surprising that a risen Savior would reveal Himself to His disciples in such a simple, even ordinary way.

[16:11] But isn't that the way that we encounter the Lord as well? Now, as Anglicans, we talk about what we call the ordinary means of grace. We call them ordinary because they're ordinary.

These include the proclamation of the Biblical Gospel and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, which we could just as easily call the breaking of bread.

We go so far as to say, as Anglicans, that the Church of Christ is present wherever the Biblical Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. Now, there is nothing flashy about the breaking of bread.

There's nothing flashy about Biblical preaching. It's not dramatic. But this is where we encounter Jesus. As those on the road to Emmaus did, we encounter Jesus and faith is kindled and strengthened.

And we grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord as we encounter Him here. And that's why it is so important that we worship every week. Because worship is where these things happen.

[17:22] If we're going to grow in our Christian walk, we need to hear the Gospel preached and practice the breaking of bread over and over again. It's also why it's so important that we spend time in disciplined Bible study, reading the Word of God and finding Gospel refreshment throughout the week.

It's also why it's so important that we are in regular daily prayer, mentioned in our reading from Acts, which is, of course, another means of grace. It's also why it's so important that we not compromise with preaching and teaching that is not faithful to the Word of God.

Now, in these ordinary and not at all flashy things, we meet Jesus. And it changes our hearts and changes our lives.

That's surprising, isn't it? But it's also amazing. At the end of the day, brothers and sisters, Jesus, the crucified Savior, Jesus, the Rhythm Lord, surprises us.

He surprises us by what He did for us. He surprises us with the wonderful salvation that we have in Him. He surprises us that He has given us the Scriptures and the proclamation of the Gospel so that we can really know who He is and what He has done.

[18:51] He surprises us in that He is made known to us in the breaking of bread. But the surprises aren't over. He will come again in glory.

He will raise the dead and judge the world and those who put their trust in Him will dwell with Him forever. Jesus surprises us because He is a Savior who provides more than we could ever hope for and all we could ever need.

And that is an amazing surprise. Glory be to His precious name forever. Amen. Amen.