He’s Not There
John 20:1-10

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

When I was 15 years old, I came home and my father told me one of my best friends, Erica, had passed away. I immediately was heartbroken, I cried, I almost fainted. This girl and I have known each other for years. When My family moved to this neighborhood, she was the first person I met and made me feel welcome in this strange place. I couldn’t wrap my mind around her being gone. I ran around the corner to her house I rang the doorbell……….and Erica answered the door…. I gasp for air, I almost fainted again. I reached to touch her arm and grab her hand to see if this was real….She wasn’t dead, she was alive…My father had gotten the person mixed up, it was not Erica, it was someone else. I grabbed her and hugged her because I thought all was lost, I thought she was gone, I thought there would be an empty space where a best friend lived in my heart. But that was not the case because, she was alive. I laughed and cried and rejoiced because she was not dead, she was alive!…..In that moment, I thought, I could only imagine what the disciples felt when they got the news that Jesus was Alive!

When the group who ran to the tomb and saw the tomb was empty…I can only imagine….They were expecting to see a person lying dead after an excruciating death, but when they got to the tomb, it was clear, the tomb was empty, they thought all was lost, the hole in their heart was forever empty, but to their surprise…..He was not there….He was alive!

We have been walking through the book of John and chronicling the life of Jesus as He journeyed to the cross. Today…this Easter Sunday… we find ourselves at the moment of truth. Jesus has struggled to carry his cross to Golgotha. He is nailed to a cross, and thorns have been placed on his head…he is bleeding, his side is punctured…He has forgiven those who are ridiculing Him by saying, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. He has granted life eternal to a thief that was hung alongside him, telling him, today you will be with me in paradise, He has established care for His mother by telling the disciple He loved to behold his mother and to His mother, he tells her to behold her son. He has had his one-on-one conversation with Abba His father and cried out, My God why have you forsaken me. He has fulfilled prophesy and declared that He is thirsty. He has solidified and stamped the accomplished work of the cross when he says, Tetelistai…It is finished! He closes out his discourse from the cross by walking into the hands… the only hands who could provide Him rest…saying… Into thy, the Father’s hands…. I commit my spirit.
He is buried in a tomb... my grandfather would teach that... They laid him in a borrowed tomb. This is the tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea. Likely a person of stature who would not publicly express his belief, but wanted to show his loyalty by providing this tomb for Jesus to be buried in.

Jesus is buried. Friday has come to a close, Saturday has made its way with no signs of success. Then Sunday morning...As Pastor Mark preached a couple weeks ago...On Friday there was concern, but Sunday is a coming. Well, here we are. Sunday is here, the few followers that did not run away are waiting, depressed, broken, confused, and here comes the word they all were waiting for, but consciously doubted they would see... the tomb is empty...He is not there!

His absence from the tomb, proved to be real. His absence from the tomb shows the evidence of a faith we can believe in. Why is that important, because there are a lot of counterfeits who claim to be the truth, but they fall short. There are some religions, some belief systems out there that are trying to be the real thing...They are trying to fill a void, they are trying to be the answer to our questions but with close examination they fail to be sufficient...with a little testing they prove to be fakes.

Many of you have heard the term, The Real McCoy. "The real McCoy" was the inventor Elijah McCoy, an African American born in Canada in 1844. He had many different inventions including an ironing board and a lawn sprinkler. Other companies copied his devices, but these never worked as well as Elijah's so people would say, "I want a... whatever the device..., and make sure it's a real McCoy."

When the disciples found the tomb empty, Jesus proved that the faith He was presenting was the real McCoy.

There are many options these days, I know you see them as you peruse Facebook and Instagram and other Web related sites...but make no mistake there is only one Real McCoy. There are many religions to choose from these days.

Here are some basic facts about a few of the major ones...

Hinduism - •Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God, and that there are a multitude of gods that come from him •Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived

Buddhism - •Buddhism arose from one man’s quest for Enlightenment whom they call the Buddah. ...The path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom.

Islam - •Followers of Islam are called Muslims. •Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Qur’an, and the Sunnah. •According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to His law. •Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God. •They believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad.

Mormonism - •The church is called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or The Church of Jesus Christ. •Mormons believe their church is a restoration of the Church as conceived by Jesus and that the other Christian churches have gone astray. •it was founded by Joseph Smith and they believe God
has a physical body, is married, and can have children. They also believe that humans can become gods in the afterlife.

None of them have the evidence of an empty tomb. None of them can base their claim in solid proof with witnesses and testimony. Only Christianity, followers of Christ can make that claim.

It is significant that John along with the rest of the Gospel writers designated the day of the resurrection as the “first day of the week” rather than the third day after the crucifixion. Although the death of Jesus was absolutely crucial for salvation and the forgiveness of sins, we have to admit this changed everything. Now, “the hinge point of Christianity” is the resurrection.

These religions provide something to believe in, but only one belief system has a foundation that is proven and established by evidence of witnesses and an empty tomb. Only one stands for eternity. Only one belief passes the truth test. Only one faith is able to provide eternal life through faith alone that is not dependent upon your work…a faith that is not dependent on status…a faith that is grounded in the work of one person whose name is Jesus Christ. Only one proves to be the real thing.

In our text today, Sunday has come and to the surprise of those who were still very close to Jesus, Even though he told them what would happen, they witnessed a miracle for themselves....

What we learn from this passage is, Don’t discredit the impossible, because with God all things are possible.

We begin in chapter 20 verse 1....and what we learn here is

1. Hearing is not necessarily believing

John 20:1-2 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

We see, it is Mary who first comes to the tomb. This was the Mary that is recorded as having seven demons removed by Jesus, and Jesus had done for her what no one else could do. He had forgiven and cleansed her. So, she comes in the darkness sometime after 3:00 A.M., only to discover that something has happened. The stone has been removed. When Mary got to the grave, she knew with dismay someone had been there.

Jesus has been preaching and teaching that this was to come. But the disciples were so focused and set on the overthrowing of the Roman empire, that they did not perceive or really care to hear that Jesus’ way to victory was to be nailed to a cross.

The appearance and emotion were to walk and believe Jesus, but what we see they missed it....

Joseph Parker in his commentary on the book of John says...

“Mary rushed into the details of a controversy instead of standing a little way from it and catching its outlines and its general hearings. There is very much practical atheism in this devoted woman’s talk. Though she is speaking to angels, she has left God out of her sobbing and tearful speech, and
consequently the words which ought to have glowed with a sublime faith are only feverish with personal disappointment, and more or less of peevish complaint. She speaks as if the whole question lay between certain other people and herself; thus, “They have taken” and “I know not.” She is lost where millions of other people have been lost; that is to say, in the murky and noisy region of second causes. She was calculating time by her own ill-going clock, and not taking the hour from the unchanging and truth-telling sun; just what we are all doing – and in the doing of which we bring ourselves to disappointment and tears.”

She likes us hear the word, we read the word, but does or life actually exemplify a life that believes the word. Are we looking to the bible for answers or waiting to see what the morning news says? Are we looking to God for direction or hoping our horoscope tells us what to do next? Are our children looking to us for how to live this believing Christian life, or finding their role models seeking everything, other than the Gospels, the word of God for answers?

We need to follow the advice of James in chapter 1 verse 22 of his book James 1:22 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

We need to strive more to be doers of the word and not just hearers.

1-We have learned...Hearing is not necessarily believing....

2.  When Jesus steps in, Doubt is replaced by Anticipation

John 20:3-6 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,

You know I’m a track guy...so the first time I read through this, I could see the foot race, I actually wished I could have been there to witness this “disciple run-off” this “disciple run-a-thon”, I wonder how much John won by, where is the ESPN footage of that... I thought of how when I ran the 400 meters which is one time around the track, when you turn that last curve, and you see the finish line... (show the pic of John and Peter running)....
a burst of adrenaline shoots through your body, an extra dose of energy is pumped in...because you see the goal, you see the finish line, you see what you have been looking for....the younger John and older Peter heard that Jesus was not there, the stone was rolled away and Jesus was not in it...and the anticipation jumped through the roof and both of these men jolted to see is it possible that Jesus actually did what he said he was going to do.

John arrived first, but didn’t go in. We don’t really know if this is because he was trying to be respectful or if he was afraid to step into the tomb. What we do know is that Peter, even though he lost the race, he was the first to go inside the tomb.

Gerald L. Borchert, The New American Commentary says this,

“John is thinking, “Body robbers leaving body wrappings? Do those ideas connect?” They must have started his mind into a computing mode that ended in believing. Before long, however, the slower running Peter arrived at the tomb “following” him. The reader will remember with a smile that when Peter finally recognized he needed to have his feet washed, he asked for a shower (13:8–9); but much more seriously the reader will recall that after Peter professed a willingness to lay down his life for Jesus (13:37), he denied Jesus three times (19:17–27); that in the face of the arresting band, he sliced off the ear of Malchus (18:10) but then backed down to a servant girl (18:17); and that at the sea when he learned it was the Lord on the land, he hastily jumped off the boat and sprang into the water (21:7). As one searches the Gospels, the examples continue to multiply. While the beloved disciple paused outside the tomb to view the scene, Simon Peter entered.
The gospel accounts seem to focus on Peter mostly because he is probably broken more than most because he had just betrayed Jesus, He betrayed the Messiah.

How could he go on? Every time he wakes up, he thinks about his mistake. Every time he would walk by the temple, he would have to think about Jesus, every time he saw people gathered around a fire, he would be reminded of the night that he betrayed Jesus.

But seeing an empty tomb gave Him hope, that his denial was not the end of his story, The empty tomb meant, Peter had a chance to make up for the mistakes he had made.

And understand, the stone rolled in front of the grave did not keep Jesus in the tomb. The tomb was open not to let Jesus’ body out but to let the disciples and the world see that He rose. So, when Mary saw that it was removed, this was for her and the other disciples to see for themselves, that Jesus had risen. The doubt that they carried from the cruel scene at the cross, was met with an empty grave...and now what was once doubt, is now anticipation...He died, they buried him...and now, all they see is His cloths.

The graveclothes were lying on the stone shelf in the tomb without any evidence of violence or crime. But the graveclothes were empty! The process of the spices and the linen used for burial created a casing, so what John saw, was like a chrysalis, a shell. Jesus’ grave cloths lay there like an empty cocoon, still retaining the shape of Jesus’ body.

Seeing this, it was evident that this was not a robbery, there is no way they could have taken his body without breaking this shell, the only possible answer was.... Jesus had risen just as He said He would.

Get the picture, they saw the crucifixion, they saw the nails, they saw the blood stream down from Jesus’ body. In the back of their minds, they wish this wasn’t so, but when they get to the tomb the stone is rolled away, and we see from the other Gospels, there is an angel that confirms what they saw.

Their doubt was replaced by anticipation. Where is our Lord, what does He look like now? For Peter I can only imagine what is going on in his head, What do I say first? Do I apologize for denying Him? Do I tell Him, you were right, I messed up? Do I see Him and say nothing? Do I run and bow at His feet?

No matter what their thoughts were, they moved from doubt to anticipation. Their fears were replaced with faith. Their questions of resurrection were met with an empty tomb. They are an example of how doubt in the presence of Jesus can move to anticipation of the possibilities.

What are you doubting today, what questions do you have? What is keeping you up at night and making you lose sleep. I want to tell you today, invite Jesus into your situation and watch your doubt move to anticipation, watch your fears be transformed into faith.

Look at your doubt and see the empty tomb.

We have learned... 1- Hearing is not necessarily believing...2-When Jesus steps in, Doubt is replaced by Anticipation 3. See and believe because the evidence is clear.
John 20:7-10 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes.

The disciples are struggling to accepted what they see, but what we have is a confirmation of the resurrection. The natural inclination is to doubt. But what they saw was true. Yet, over the course of the years, there have been many who have tried to present arguments to discredit the risen savior and the proof of the empty tomb.

Here are a few of the major objections:
Jesus did not rise from the dead; His body was stolen from the tomb....The question is, who would have stolen it? Neither the Jews nor the Romans who wanted him dead would have stolen it. As a matter of fact, it would have proven their point to be able to display the body for all to see so that they could humiliate the followers and put an end to this group of people who followed Christ.

Also, the disciples could not have stolen the body with the Roman guard at the door. All accounts show that the disciples were scared and disheartened after the crucifixion. They would not have risked their lives for a cause that was a lie. And when you look at the power in which the disciples carried on the message of the gospel from a group with everything against them. This would not make sense for them to hide the body.

Another objection is that Jesus only fainted and then recovered from His wounds.... Crucifixion is excruciating. And included asphyxia or suffocation, dehydration, and heart failure. It would have been impossible for a beaten Jesus to move the stone and limp from his grave. Then to show himself to the disciples. They would have been more discouraged with this weak beaten-up Jesus than encouraged.

Another objection is the witnesses who saw him after he died were just seeing things. Question, could 500 plus people see a hallucination at the same time? He appeared several times. Peter, Thomas, the disciples, the women at the tomb.

None of those objections hold up...because Jesus did get up and He is alive.

You can look to Hinduism...but they believe in reincarnation...so you come alive...but you keep dying...You can look to Buddhism...but last I checked...Buddha died, and he is still dead...You can look to Islam...but the last I check Muhammad died and is still dead...You can look to Mormonism...but John smith died and is still dead...

But when you look to Jesus...all the evidence presented...all the stories told...the only conclusion you have to make is...he did die...but he is not dead.....He is alive. It looked like the game was over, But Jesus came through in the clutch.

It was September 30, 2014, the Royals were in a winner take all one game playoff with the Oakland A’s to see if they could finally make it to the play offs after 29 years. Everyone was watching, tuning into the game with anticipation. The first inning comes and before you know it the A’s are up 2 to 1. But it’s only the first inning so there’s nothing to worry about. Then the second inning passes and no change. Then the third inning comes, and the Royals get 2 runs and now lead the game 3 to 2 and you can hear the collective
sigh of relief all over Kansas City; this really might be our year. The 4th and 5th go by, and the Royals are still ahead 3 to 2.... Then the 6th inning comes, and like a punch in the gut, the Oakland A’s get 5 runs to take over the lead 7 to 3, 7-3 and you could hear the wails and cries all over Kansas City as everyone accepted defeat, unable to watch the rest of the game out of fear of another broken-hearted season Tv’s go off everywhere because there is no coming back from this.

So, after the game I sent a text message to a Royals fan and I say “ok I’m a believer now.” And he didn’t respond because he was one of those who turned the tv off after the sixth inning. Early the next morning he sends me a text back that says what happened?

You see when he turned his tv off, he didn’t see that by the 9th inning, the royals had tied the game up to 7 -7. And in the 12th inning, Salvador Perez hit a single that brought the game winning run in bringing the score to 9-8 and the victory for the Royals.

It looked like the game was over, it looked like there was no coming back, but when it looked like all was lost the winning run came home.

Mary thought the game was over, Peter thought the game was over, they had turned off their faith, there was no coming back... this is over...But when they witnessed the empty tomb, they have just experienced the greatest comeback ever.

You don’t have to feel like your game is over because God responds to the impossible. He restores the broken...and He brings dead situations to life. Not just life, but life more abundantly.

We have learned that 1- Hearing is not necessarily believing...We have learned 2-When Jesus steps in, Doubt is replaced by Anticipation. Finally, we are taught to See and believe because the evidence is clear.

I don’t know where you are in your belief or acceptance of Jesus and the cross, but I challenge you to take the journey to find Him. If you seek Him, He will find you.

Amen! Let’s Pray.