

# The Third Way Wins!

Setting:

The third day after Jesus' crucifixion.

The disciples are in hiding.

Not sure of what they believe about much of anything anymore.

Feeling more and more like what they thought was too good to be true turned out, in fact, to be too good to be true.

Feeling like they are going to have to move on to a Jesus-less future.

It's so painful to remember everything they've been through with Jesus, but they can't help themselves.

The scene opens:

Peter: Remember how Jesus used the Scriptures?

Matthew: Yeah, that was crazy. I mean, when Jesus talked about the Scriptures and just the way He lived the Scriptures, it was like He was showing us this whole other story in there.

I'd never noticed it before, but, like, with Jesus, it was suddenly so obvious it was there. It's like it was the whole point, but somehow, we'd all been missing it.

Andrew: Yeah, with Jesus there was this whole other path winding through the Scriptures.

John: I know, right? Like a Path of Peace.

Bartholomew: Yeah, it's like I always thought the whole thing was about God making us into a stronger people, helping us to fulfill our destiny as the greatest people, or at least giving us our nation back, but Jesus kept pointing to all this stuff about a way of peace and loving those without power.

James: I know! And at first I was thinking: well, that's a nice thing to meditate on. I can recite "Blessed are the poor" over and over, and I'll probably reach some higher spiritual plane.

Or, like sure, that sounds like what heaven might be like. But then Jesus went out and actually DID all that stuff."

Matthew: "Right?! I can't believe he actually LIVED like that."

Philip: And every time I expected Him to start taking charge to set this stuff up as the new law of the land, someone would NEED something for Him, and He'd get distracted by serving them.

Bartholomew: It's like He couldn't help it.

It's like He got so caught up in LIVING GENEROUSLY.

It's like He couldn't help Himself.

Like, at the end of the day, He couldn't help BUT help.

Like even if He should've been starting to line-up the takeover, it just wasn't in Him to do it.

It's like His essence was to just give and sacrifice.

Peter: That was His only problem, right? He GAVE too much. Do you think He thought He could just LOVE his plan into existence?

His goals were great, but seriously, what was His plan? Just give and give and love and love until....what exactly?

Andrew: I have no idea. I can't believe He didn't even defend Himself after they arrested Him.

Peter: That's what I'm saying. It's like he loved TOO much. It's like He didn't realize that if He actually wanted a world of LOVE, He'd have to do more than just love the world.

He'd have to...like...defeat the things that wanted to defeat love.

He'd have to beat them at their own game AND THEN the love and the lifting up the poor stuff could happen.

Thomas: I don't know guys. You seem to have Him a lot more figured out than I did.

Honestly, I don't feel like any of it makes sense to me.

Seriously, do you remember what He did just like four days ago?! With the fig tree?!

Like, we're all walking down the road, and Jesus is like: *Hmmm, I guess I'll have a fig.*

And then he's like: "What?! This fig tree haveth no figs?!?!"

And we're like, "Jesus, I don't think it's fig season..."

And before we can even finish, He's like cursing the fig tree and telling us not to act like the fig trees."

John: Yeah, that was weird.

Thomas: Yeah, exactly. It was weird all the time, man.

It was like every time He taught us something, there was something more that needed to be said or done to make it all make sense.

It was like He was this amazing teacher for an entire semester, but everything He taught still needed like one final lesson to tie it all up before it actually all made sense.

And, like, instead of teaching us the final lesson to tie it all together, He just died...

Mary and Mary burst through the doors.

Mary: You guys... (huffing and puffing)

Other Mary: You guys... (huffing and puffing)

Mary: Seriously, you guys... (huffing and puffing)

Other Mary: Seriously you guys... (huffing and puffing)

Peter: Just take a breath you two.

Mary: (Deep breath). You guys. Seriously. We were just at the tomb...

Other Mary: And there was this being who was so bright it was like staring at the sun—

Mary: Like...an angel...

Other Mary: Sitting on the stone in front of Jesus' tomb—

Mary: Except not in front.

Other Mary: Right! Except not in front because the stone was rolled to the side.

Mary: And this crazy-scary sunshine being is like, "Be not afraid..."

Other Mary: And we're both like, "Uhhh, that's not gonna happen..."

Mary: And he's like, "I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified, but He is not here for He has been raised. Come see for yourselves."

Other Mary: And Jesus was DEFINITELY NOT in there!

Mary: And we're like, "Raised what?" So you moved Him to a higher up cave? Like on a mountain or something? That's weird."

Other Mary: And he's like, "He has been raised FROM THE DEAD."

Mary: Yeah, and then he's like, "And, you know, He's strolling down to Galilee. THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM."

Thomas: No offense guys, but...I kinda doubt it.

Mary: Oh, just wait. We haven't even GOTTEN STARTED with the stuff you're gonna doubt.

Other Mary: Yeah, cause we're on our way here, and boom—

Mary: Yeah. Boom.

Other Mary: Boom. It's Jesus.

Peter: WHAT's Jesus?

Mary: It's Jesus ON THE ROAD.

Andrew: Like, a ghost?

Mary: No, we hit the dirt and grabbed His feet.

Other Mary: And they were real feet and everything.

Mary: And then He's like, "Well I gotta go. You go tell my brothers."

Other Mary: So here we are...uh...telling you...

Thomas: Yeah, I definitely doubt this.

Mary: Well, go see for yourselves. He said to tell you to meet Him on that mountain in Galilee.

## Scene Two

A mountain in Galilee

Some disciples are looking around expectantly.

Some are just shaking their heads.

Others are sitting staring at the dirt.

Someone just kind of appears. He's there, but no one really saw where He came from.

Peter: It's Jesus!

Thomas: No. There's no way.

Mary: See, we told you!

Andrew: There's now way. It's not Him.

James: I...I...I think it's really Him.

Other Mary: See!

The Someone: My brothers, I'm here to tell you that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

So go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have taught you. Bless everyone.

Do what I taught and what I did: Join together to be a new family with anyone who will embrace this plan to bless everyone. Teach people that this is THE WAY. Help everyone to walk the Path of Peace like we did.

Pause

The Someone: Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The Someone disappears

End Scene; Curtains Close

My brothers and sisters, we are gathered here today—Easter morning—because of a most unbelievable thing.

And we're not so unlike the disciples.

Even 2000 years later, some of us feel like we can peer back into this Easter story and see just enough of This Someone to feel fairly certain that we the person we see is Jesus.

If so, bless you today in the audacity of your faith.

And some of us aren't so sure. Some of us are still staring and wondering, questions in hand. And of course you are.

Matthew 28:17 says that even Jesus' closest friends, while standing right in front of Him, couldn't be sure that the one who stood before them and spoke to them was Jesus.

If you're one of THEM, bless YOU today for the audacity AND honesty of YOUR faith, too.

Whichever disciple you are in this story--and in our story as it continues today—bless you for choosing to come here this morning to stand on the mountaintop that is Easter.

Bless you for choosing to look for Jesus.

Now, I know that some of us envy those first disciples.

We think: Why am I supposed to take some two-thousand-year-old text's word for something?

Why am I supposed to trust in something that I, MYSELF, don't get to investigate with my own two eyes.

And, if you feel some of that, I'm with you.

When it comes to feeling certain about our faith, I'm with you in feeling like the first disciples seem to have had an edge.

But if you've been following along with what I've been preaching the past few weeks, I hope it won't come as a surprise to you when I say that certainty isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

Because it's not the essence of faith; it's just one component of it.

Whether you feel certain or whether you have doubt, neither your certainty nor your doubt ARE what matters most about your faith.

If you're certain, there are benefits that come with your certainty, but there are temptations, too.

You get to live with some extra assurance, but you may also miss some of what our mysterious God is teaching because you think you have it all figured out, or you want to keep making sure you can feel like you have it all figured out.

And if you wrestle with doubt, there are struggles that come with that, but there are also blessings, too.

Your day-to-day faith walk may feel like an overwhelming struggle some days, but you also hold the fuel for a relationship with God that is profoundly dynamic—alive and open to new things.

And since we worship a God who is chalk full of surprises, believe me, you may be wonderfully well prepared to see beyond the restrictions of the box that so many of us limit God to.

But wherever you find yourself on the certainty-doubt spectrum today, there is actually something we have access to that the disciples in this story were still going to have to take a lot of time and effort to figure out.

Did you notice that?

Did you notice that at the end of today's reading, which is the end of Matthew's Gospel, there's no clear sense yet that the disciples know exactly what this all means, or even what Jesus is talking about!

In fact, we know that they actually DON'T have it all figured out in that moment because in most of the rest of New Testament—in all those epistles or letters that got passed around the early church—we see them continuing to work at making sense of it all.

And more than that, while they were living in it, moment by moment, we can hold the whole story in our hands at once.

We can read it all at once, think about how it all ties together, and say: "Oh! THIS is how it all fits together!"



Now, there are a few ways to describe how it all fits together—each with some tremendous truth to them.

In our time and place, we most often hear people talk about Jesus' death saving us from our sins.

In other times and places, the church talked a lot about Jesus' death and resurrection being the spiritual defeat of evil,

or of Jesus' death revealing how truly broken our worldly norms are because Jesus' integrity made it impossible for the world to allow Him to live.

But this Easter, I simply want to say this, "Jesus' resurrection means that love wins."

Jesus' death and resurrection means that there is another way.

Jesus' death and resurrection means that we are invited to have the audacity to choose a way of living that the world tells us is impossible.

Do you remember last week, how I tried to show that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Sunday, people could likely only imagine two outcomes to what I called the Big Hit?

That there could only be two outcomes to Jesus' collision with the powers of His time.

Either Jesus was going to win, or Jesus was going to lose, right?

And so, if you were a disciple viewing it that way, you were thinking:

*OK. Finally. Jesus is going to make His move and fight the powers that be, and conquer this land, and be our king, and then make this a nation of love.*

And so, if you were a disciple, when Jesus dies, your only option is to believe that Jesus has lost. That the good thing didn't happen, and that it was all for nothing.

Unless...

Unless...

Unless...

Unless there is something else going on here.

Unless there is a third way.

Unless something impossible is possible.

Which is exactly what happens.

In this story, the impossible happens, and Jesus comes back to life!

Which is to say that a third way IS possible.

How so?

As we've seen through Matthew, the essence of Jesus' life has been love and compassion and self-sacrifice.

And while, by worldly standards, we had to expect that eventually Jesus would have to at least momentarily set those nice things aside to conquer the people's oppressive rulers,

Jesus stays true to the way of peace and love and compassion and sacrifice right to the very end.

Presented with the conflict that should decide it all, Jesus just doubles down on nonviolent love and compassion and self-sacrifice.

Which means that when Jesus is confronted with the Big Fight, Jesus allows Himself to be crucified. To love His enemies and to sacrifice Himself.

Which shouldn't be surprising because that's been his essence all through the story.

But it's still totally surprising to us because the world's logic says that it will never work.

Peace and love and self-sacrifice are nice, but they don't win.

They're what you do after you secure yourself some safety through necessary force.

But Jesus stays true to His essence.

Which means Jesus loses to the powers that be.

Which means it was all nice...but for nothing.

Unless...

Unless...

Unless...

On the third day, the impossible happens.

On the third day, another way IS revealed.

On the third day, we discover that Jesus DIDN'T lose.

On the third day, we discover that Jesus DIDN'T compromise His essence of love and peace and self-sacrifice  
AND that He still won.

On the third day, Jesus conquers on a level so high that a successful revolt against a local ruler looks like child's play.

On the third day, Jesus conquers DEATH. ITSELF.

Which is to say that Jesus reveals that God's essence is not violent power but exclusively love and peace and self-sacrifice.

Which is to say that Jesus reveals that God, to the very end and to the core of God's being, is compassion and generosity.

And, more than that, the resurrection says that IN THE END—in the very end—no matter what else this broken world says and tries to show again and again and again, TRUE LOVE WINS. NONVIOLENT, COMPASSIONATE, AND SELF-GIVING LOVE WINS.

It may not seem to win to us in our daily lives.

It may seem that anger and violence and exploitation are getting the last word.

It may seem that even if we want to confront anger and violence and exploitation, we'll need to do so in force—because force is all that seems to work.

But the resurrection asks us to believe in the impossible.

The resurrection asks us to see that the essence of God is love and self-sacrifice

And the resurrection asks us to believe that love and self-sacrifice will win.

...

So do you remember back when I preached on miracles and the Feeding of the 5000,

and I told you that whatever you believe about what happened that day,

if you believe in living generously in a world that appears not to have enough to go around,

and if you believe in giving love in a world that seems to reward the selfish,

and if you believe in visiting the sick and the dying in a world where we all die anyway—

if you believe those things, well then,

whatever you believe about the actual Feeding of the 5000, you functionally believe in miracles?

Do you remember that?

Well, I hope you don't mind hearing it again, and I hope you don't mind me upping the ante. Because here it is.

If, in a world where violence and force seem to be the only reliable way to get what you want, you still choose to walk the Path of Peace;

If, in a world where the selfish always seem to be the ones to get ahead, you still choose to live generously and to make sacrifices for others;

If, in a world where everyone dies, you still choose to visit the sick and dying.

If, in a world where we're told that the ultimate goal is to become the best that we as an individual can be, you still choose to sacrifice some of your desires and preferences in order to be in community.

If, in a world of violence and death, you believe that something more is possible than what we can see and measure,

Well, then,

No matter how much doubt you carry about this story or anything else,

You just might believe in the resurrection, too.

...

And so today, as a response to the journey we've taken through Lent  
And as a response to where we find ourselves on Easter,  
I'm going to invite you to consider doing something to reframe your doubts in Jesus  
and to embrace the unbelievably Good News that love wins.

When I'm done talking, Scott and Lena are going to play some music, and Ann Claassen, Judy Nord, Phil Rempel, and Jill Baker are going to take up their positions around the room.

As that happens, you can complete the orangey-yellow insert in your bulletins.

There should be some pencils in the pew in front of you—though some of you may need to share.

If you don't have a bulletin, flag an usher, who can bring one to you.

On the sheet, you can write down a doubt that you're carrying with you today.

It could be the doubt you wrote down at the beginning of Lent, or it could be something else.

Whatever you'd like.

And you don't have to write down a lot.

No one else is going to read it or open it up after you fold it up.

Myself included.

What you write down is just between you and God, and I don't think God needs you to spell it out perfectly.

Once you've written it down, fold it up a couple of times and write your name down on the outside so that the person you hand it to can read your name.

Then, if you're able, get up and bring it to Ann, Judy, Phil, or Jill.

If you're not able, give it to someone near you to carry with them, or give it to me.

I'll be roving around, collecting up any stray doubts.

And then the following will happen:

The person you bring it to will announce, so that all of us can hear it, "Jesus alive!"

And then this is your other job:

Whenever you hear Ann, Judy, Phil, or Jill announce, “Jesus is alive!”, your job, as an entire congregation is to shout, “So love wins!”

After which Ann, Judy, Phil, or Jill will finish a blessing for you and allow you to head back to your seat.

In short:

Write down your doubt.

Fold your sheet.

Bring it to Ann, Judy, Phil, or Jill.

And whenever you hear someone announce “Jesus is alive!”, shout “So love wins!”

Let’s practice the call and response part. I’ll pretend I’m Ann, Judy, Phil, or Jill and that \_\_\_\_\_ has just handed me their doubt.

“ \_\_\_\_\_, Jesus is alive!”

Got it? If you have questions, flag me down after we start.

And lastly, if your doubt is about core parts of this Easter story itself, and you’re DOUBTING whether or not you should participate in this today,

Trust your own conscience,

But I invite you to have the audacity to receive today’s words of love and assurance either way.

I invite you to join the disciples who—whether they were certain or in doubt—still headed up to the mountain to see what might happen for them.

Let’s begin.