Easter Weekend 2019 – Forgiveness Msg 1

Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl

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 **The Risen Way Rollin Video**

<https://vimeo.com/157066918>

One of the greatest proofs for the reality of what happened on that first Easter is the difference that it made in the lives of those who were there.

The radical transformation that took place, as they came face to face with the risen Christ.

I want us to look at how for them, and for us . . . .

 **Easter Changes Everything**

We’re going to look at that this morning.

But first I want to say WELCOME .. . my name is . . .

Glad that you could join us for our Easter Celebration as we’re kicking off a new teaching series on Forgiveness.

It's appropriate that we start this series on Easter, because without the resurrection, there would be no ultimate forgiveness.

And without forgiveness, there is no hope of reconciliation between us and other people, and between us as and God.

In the weeks ahead we’ll explore what it means to forgive ourselves, what it means to forgive others, what it means to live in the power of forgiveness.

But the reality is that we can’t give out what we haven’t received and so this morning I want us to look at how we can

FIND FORGIVENESS.

And we’re going to do that by looking at one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus

We’re going to look at the story of a time that Jesus appeared to the disciple Peter, and several of the other disciples after he rose on that first Easter morning.

But to really understand that we need to see a little bit of the back story and see where those disciples were

 Before They Met The Risen Christ

And what I want you to notice is that there is nothing in this story in terms of positive spin

If you were making this stuff up, trust me, you would have made these first followers of Jesus look much better than they do on the pages of the Bible.

Jesus has died, and if you wanted to write a story about his followers in such a way that it would inspire others to join their movement, you would have portrayed them as COURAGEOUS, not as COWARDS.

Instead, what the Bible tells us is that as soon as Jesus was arrested

 ***“…. all the disciples deserted him and fled.” Matthew 26:56***

All four gospels tell the story the same way.

They all tell us, that all of his followers took off running.

The gospel writer Mark (Mark 14:51-52) tells us that one of the young men who was following Jesus got so scared that when Jesus was arrested, and they tried to grab this guy by his tunic,

 He took off running and left his tunic behind and ran away naked.

It’s in the BIBLE!

You ought to read it!

These are the *COURAGEOUS* followers of Jesus.

These are the guys who had loudly proclaimed, *“We will stand with you no matter what happens.”*

*“Even if we have to die with you, we will be there.”*

And yet what really happened?

What happened was, at the first sign of trouble, they take off running.

Every last one of them including their self-appointed leader - - Peter

Remember, Peter was the one who had insisted . . . .

 *“Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!”*

And yet when the pressure is on, this same Peter, collapses like a house of cards

He actually falls apart . . .

 Under the casual questioning of a middle school girl.

 The Bible tells us that this same Peter, who had sworn that he would never deny Jesus

 ***“... began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’” Matthew 26:74***

Not only do these first disciples bail at the moment of Jesus’ arrest, they didn’t stick around for his trial, or his crucifixion, or even his burial, at which point you would assume, the threat to them had dissipated.

But instead, here’s what happened . . .

Two of his secret disciples . . .

A rich man named Joseph and a Jewish leader named Nicodemus came at night, when no one else could see them and asked permission to take Jesus body down from the cross so they can bury him

And so these two, Joseph and Nicodemus, come to bury Jesus and. . .

Not one of his closest friends,

Not one of his twelve disciples are anywhere to be found.

If you were making this story up, trust me, there is no way you would have written it this way.

Those, who would be the leaders of this early church, are portrayed as cowards.

They run away when Jesus is arrested.

Their leader, Peter, denies that he has ever met Jesus

They don’t stick around for his trial

And after he is sentenced, the only ones who stick around at the cross are some of the women

And that’s a significant detail

 The women were at the cross

 The women were helping Joseph and Nicodemus

And the women were the first to arrive at the tomb on Easter Sunday morning

And the reason why this was such an important detail is because in that Patriarchal culture.

In that male chauvinist, first century culture.

You would never write a story in such a way that the women are braver than the men,- - - unless they were.

What we read in this Easter story, doesn’t sound like a work of fiction, it sounds like an eye witness account.

But even the women who were the first to arrive at the tomb, didn’t expect to find what they found when they got there.

It says . . .

 ***“But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.” Luke 24:1***

What they expected to find at the tomb was exactly what you would expect to find at the tomb if your loved one died and it was three days later.

They expected to find Jesus dead.

And when they find the tomb empty, their first reaction is not *“He is Risen”*

Their first reaction is *“Somebody stole the body”*

And they go tell the disciples, who are where?

Hiding . . .

Hiding. . . .

  ***with the doors locked for fear. . .” John 20:19***

What were they afraid of?

These disciples had just seen Jesus arrested and taken away . . .

They were afraid that the same religious leaders who came after Jesus would be coming after them next.

And the other reason they were hiding was . . .

Why should they risk their lives for a dead Messiah?

You see. . . .

At the CORE of Jesus message was JESUS

The center of Jesus’ message was Jesus

If He was gone, what was left?

 He claimed . . . (that he was)

The resurrection and the life

And now he’s dead

He claimed . . . (that he was)

 The Son of God

AND NOW HE’S DEAD

He claimed . . .

The gates of Hell won’t be able to stop us

AND NOW HE’S DEAD

He claimed . . .

 To be the Messiah

AND NOW HE’S DEAD

In the minds of his first followers the fact that Jesus was dead negated everything else he said.

So why would they be motivated to go on for a lie?

BEFORE THE RESURRECTION you have

DEFEATED DISCIPLES

DESPONDENT WOMEN (and a totally)

DISCREDITED LEADER

Do you know what you don’t have?

You don’t have anybody on standby outside the tomb, saying *“Hey guys, do you know what today is?”*

*“Today is resurrection day.”*

*“Do you remember what he told us when he was alive?”*

*“Do you remember how he said He would rise. . . .*

*“Well now is the time, so get ready . . .*

*10 – 9 – 8 – 7 – 6 – 5 –*

*Stand by for a resurrection. .* ***.***

That’s not what you have.

What you have is exactly what you’d expect to have, if this really happened, which it did

What you have is a group of followers who were totally and completely discouraged

What we need to remember is that when it came to the tomb in which Jesus has been placed on that first Easter morning . . .

Nobody…expected… no body

 And yet that was exactly what they found, or didn’t find.

 And for those first disciples, the result of not just finding the empty tomb, but meeting the risen Christ, was TOTAL TRANSFORMATION.

 These same disciples . . .

After The Resurrection

 Return to the same city where their Lord had been crucified, and they confront the ones responsible . . .

 They go face-to-face, toe-to-toe, with the very people who killed Jesus . . .

 They very people they had run from . . .

 And they call them out.

 They say to them. . .

***“‘You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!’” Acts 3:15***

 And they say, believe it or not . . .

 This Is Good News, because not only is he alive, but He’s proclaiming a message of FORGIVENESS

 And we’re told that THOUSANDS of people in Jerusalem rejoin this Jesus movement

 And the amazing thing is that it’s not because of anything that Jesus taught, but rather because of the message that He’s ALIVE!!!

 Does this new movement win the world?

 No!

 It evokes all kinds of hostility, spearheaded by a guy named “Saul” who we’re told was . ..

 ***“. . . uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers.” Acts 9:1***

 And then as Saul is on his way to imprison and kill some more Christians, Saul comes face to face with the risen Jesus and he becomes a Christ follower.

 And just a few years later, Saul, who by this time has changed his name to PAUL writes these words. . .

***“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.” 1 Cor. 15:3***

 And the things that he wrote in the next three verses are part of what Bible scholars tell were one of the very first creeds that the very first Christians, 2,000 years ago used to say in unison as they would gather together.

Included in that creed is the statement that Jesus appeared to more than 500 eyewitnesses.

What could transform someone like Paul who was a PERSECUTOR of the church to make him a PREACHER for Jesus Christ?

 The answer is, a personal encounter with the Risen Jesus.

 Paul was one of the more than 500 who saw Jesus after he rose.

 This morning I want us to look at one of the others. . .

 I want us to look at Peter.

 And I want us to see what John chapter 21 tells us about how Peter found forgiveness.

 And because we’re starting this series on forgiveness, I’ll start with a question, and the question is . . .

 How Did Peter Find Forgiveness?

 And the short answer is . . .

 He Didn’t, Forgiveness Found Him

 In John 21 we have the story of one of Jesus post-resurrection appearances to his disciples.

 In this case it wasn’t all his disciples but only seven.

 Peter was one of those seven.

 What’s important to note is that Peter hadn’t made this trip to the Sea of Galilee to find forgiveness, he made the trip to find fish.

 The chapter begins with Peter telling the other disciples. . .

 *“I’m going fishing.”*

 And several of them said *“We’ll come, too,”*

 They went out in a boat, they fished all night, but they caught nothing.

 It’s at that point that they meet the risen Jesus.

 He calls out to them from the shore and asks them, *“Fellows, have you caught any fish?”*

 They answer, *“No.”*

 He says, *“Well, why don’t you try this. Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you’ll catch some fish!”*

 So they did, and they couldn’t haul in the net because there were so many fish in it.

 We’re later told they had caught 153 fish.

 They take their catch to shore, where Jesus has breakfast waiting for them.

 And it’s over the course of that breakfast where Jesus has a conversation with Peter.

 It was during that conversation that Jesus asked Peter a question.

 He asked it not once, not twice, but three times.

 The question he asked was “Peter, do you love me?”

 John 21:15, Jesus asked Peter . . .

***“Simon (Peter) son of John, do you love me more than these?” John 21:15***

 What did Jesus mean by those three words . . .

 ***“more than these?”***

 Bible scholars divide into two camps when it comes to answering that question . . .

 Some would say that the “more than these” relates to where they were . . .

 One the beach, after the disciples had just finished fishing.

 Maybe Jesus was pointing to the boat, the net, and the great catch of fish.

 In which case he was asking, *“Peter, do you love me more than your work?”*

 *When I first met you . . .*

 *When I first called you to follow me, you were a fisherman.*

 *But I called you to be a fisher of men now it looks like you have gone back to fishing for fish.*

 *What’s it gonna be, Peter?*

 *Are you gonna follow the fish or are you gonna follow me?"*

 The second possibility, is that Jesus was pointing to the other six disciples sitting by the shore.

 In which case he meant, "*Peter do you love more than these other disciples love me?"*

 Because, remember, that’s what Peter had claimed.

 In the Upper Room when Jesus had warned Peter that he would disown him three times, Peter had insisted emphatically,

 ***"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."*** Matthew 26:33

 Peter found it very easy to believe the other disciples would let Jesus down but that he would remain firm.

 It was this pride that led to his own downfall and Jesus is calling him to face up to it.

 If that was the question that Jesus is asking here, then you have to love Peter’s answer.

 Rather than make a boastful claim about the level of his love, he simply appeals to Jesus “omniscience” - -

 John 21:17 he says . . .

 ***“Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” John 21:17***

 Something else we learn about FINDING FORGIVENESS through the encounter that Jesus had with Peter is that Peter came face to face with . . .

 The Transforming Power Of A Second Chance

 When it comes to human forgiveness, we’ll sometimes say, *“I may forgive, but I’ll never forget.”*

 That’s not the way that the Lord deals with us.

 He forgives and He forgets.

 Psalm 103 says . . .

 ***“His unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.” Psalm 103:11-12***

 God forgives.

 God forgets.

 Jesus meets Peter, following his resurrection, he offers him forgiveness and along with it, a second chance at a new beginning.

 PAUSE

 When Jesus first met Peter, it was on the shore of this very same Sea of Galilee where Peter was fishing . .

 The Gospel writer Mark tells us . . .

 ***“One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me…” Mark 1:16-17***

 Don’t miss those words. . .

 ***“Come, follow me…” Mark 1:16-17***

 Now here they are three years later, back on the very same beach, and what does Jesus say to Peter?

John 21:19

***“Follow Me!”***

 And again in John 21:22

 ***“As for you, follow me.” John 21:22***

 And just a kind of a footnote here . . .

 When Jesus told Peter to follow him, He didn’t say, “And you take your place at the back of the line.”

 No!

 Just as Jesus had asked Peter three times whether or not he loved him, he also told him three times what his future would look like.

 He told Peter. . .

 John 21:15

 ***“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.***

 John 21:16

 ***“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.***

 John 21:17

 ***“Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.***

 When it comes to the forgiveness that Jesus offers . . .

 A second chance doesn’t mean that you can follow, but from here on out you’ll have to follow from afar

 From here on out you’re not on the A-Team.

 A second chance doesn’t mean second string.

 Not by a long shot!

 And not only does Jesus offer us

 The Transforming Power Of A Second Chance

 He also offers us the possibility of becoming Second Chance People, who have the power and ability to forgive others.

 To forgive others even for the unforgiveable.

 As I was preparing this message I thought of one of the most powerful examples of that kind of forgiveness that I’ve ever seen and I wanted to share it with you this morning.

 **The Power Of Forgiveness ((VIDEO))**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2BITY-3Mp4>

 The transforming power of a Second Chance

 God offers it to us, and along with it the ability to offer it to others.

 If you have experienced a hurt so horrendous that you feel like you could never forgive, the one thing I hope you will take with you today is that you can, if you’ve experienced the transforming power of the forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers to you and to me.

 The final thing I want to share with you about the forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers is that it requires a response.

 Peter, heard our Lord’s offer of forgiveness

 And his invitation to come and follow and

 He Understood The Need To Make a Decision

 Jesus offered Peter a second chance and Peter took it.

 What about you?

 Have you said yes to Jesus’ offer of forgiveness?

 Peter learned that even as a follower of Jesus Christ it’s possible, to fail and fail misearbly, but he also learned that God specializes in using former failures.

 Peter, could have wallowed in his failure and stayed there.

 But in that meeting with Jesus on that beach on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. . .

 In that meeting when Jesus asked him three times, “Peter, do you love me?”

 And Peter showed him that He did, not through his WORDS but through his willingness to follow the Risen Jesus.

 And the Risen Jesus extends that same invitation to everyone who will receive it today?

 So as I get ready to wrap things up this morning . . .

 I want to ask you the question.

 Who Is Jesus Christ To You?

 I was watching an interview this week with the lead singer of the super group U2, and I’d like you to listen to what he says in response to a very bold question.

 **Who Is Jesus Christ To You? VIDEO**

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOQClgNRoPc>

If you were asked that same question . . .

 What or who is Jesus Christ to you?

 How would you answer?

 And would you be willing to share that answer with us?

 I want to ask you to find that

 **Connection Card**

Maybe when you looked at the back of that card earlier you saw this . . . .

 **Spiritual Survey**

With the letters

 **A, B, C, OR D.**

And you wondered what that was about.

Easter is a really big weekend at churches and it gives us an opportunity to do quick survey of the spiritual condition of our church.

So that as we plan for the year ahead we can have an idea of who we’re talking to.

And so if you’re willing, I’d encourage you to take part in this little survey,

I promise you no one is going to call you, we aren't going to show up at your door or anything like that, it just allows us to get a gauge of our congregation once a year.

So here’s how it works. . .

If you’re here today and you are someone who has. . . .

 **ALREADY BELIEVED**, you have already received forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

That’s what the letter "a" stands for that you have ALREADY BELIEVED

Another way to say that is you are already a Christian.

So if you would say, I'll let you know that, I am letting you know that I am already a Christian, would you just circle the letter "a".

I realize that is going to be many of you.

You have already believed.

Then for some of you, you are in letter "b", you are

 **BELIEVING TODAY**.

You just decided just a moment ago to believe and you are ready to take that next step and you circle "b" to say, I am believing today.

I have never done this before, but today I'm believing.

The letter **"A" is I have already received forgiveness**.

**"B" is I'm believing today** and receiving forgiveness

And then "c" is that you are

 **CURIOUS**

You are thinking about it.

You are considering the claims of Jesus Christ.

You are considering what it means to be a Christian.

You know, we welcome people to come to our church as long as it takes to consider the claims of Christianity.

Maybe you would just honestly circle the letter "c".

Then "D" on that little survey, is just simply you saying I

 **DON'T THINK I EVER WILL BELIEVE.**

You are just being intellectually honest.

You're saying ‑ I've kind of checked it out.

I'm here today but you know, I don't think I ever will receive forgiveness.

I don't think I ever will believe in God.

If you will just circle one of those a, b, c, or d.

In a few minutes, you can drop that in the offering bucket when it comes around and it just helps us to know the spiritual condition of our church.

So thanks for filling out that survey.

As you look over the next steps on that CC, you’ll see that one of them is to return and be here as much as possible for the rest of this forgiveness series.

 I hope today, you will make the decision to be a part of the rest of this series.

***Next week,*** we are going to talk about ***how to forgive others*** and then we are going to look at ***how to forgive ourselves.***

But today, we placed our focus on the most important thing that God offers each of us which is knowing that we’ve been forgiven by God.

That’s the starting point.

Until we get that - - - we won’t be able to get any of the other kinds of forgiveness.

I hope you walk away with that understanding.

 Would you bow your heads with me.

Let's just pray together.