

“EASTER... FROM THE INSIDE OUT”

(Matthew 28:1-10)

[PROP NEEDED: (#1) “Priceless” Easter Video; (#2) “Cracked Egg” picture on PPT]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 3-23-08]

–I–

1. Read Text Matthew 28:1-10 and Pray.
2. [WATCH “PRICELESS” VIDEO from [Sermonspice.com](http://Sermonspice.com) (Time 1:02)]

A–What IS the true meaning of Easter? Is it just another holiday on the calendar? Or is it something more?

B–[“Cracked Egg” picture on screen] In the publicity for today’s services, we’ve used a cracked egg with a mysterious light protruding from inside (like the one on screen) to represent the fact that too often in today’s world, the true meaning Easter IS a mystery to us.

1–And while most people (even non-religious ones) seem to know that it’s a religious holiday that somehow has to do with Jesus coming back to life,...

2–...there’s a lot of folks who wonder where the Easter Bunny and buying candy and chocolate and new clothes fit into all of this.

3–And more importantly, what significance does this mysterious holiday have for our lives today?

3. Well, this morning I’m not going to talk about the Easter Bunny, or chocolate candy, but I do want us to use the story of Jesus’ resurrection to explore at least three ways to talk about *the true/“inside” meaning of Easter* (Find these in bulletin “Sermon Notes”).

–II–

4. The first of these is to say that because of Easter, **FEAR FALLS BEHIND US**, just like a cocoon that a butterfly sheds as it first emerges and takes flight.

A–I want us to notice that for every use of the word “*fear*” in today’s scripture, there’s an almost immediate use of the phrase “*Do not be afraid*”<sup>1</sup> – ...

1–...As if to say that Easter destroyed the power that fear can have over our life – ...

2–...That the world can do its very worst to us, but for those who follow Christ, “fear” need not have ultimate control over us.

B–Several years ago a well-known circus developed an amazing Bengal tiger act in which the trainer was locked inside the cage, commanding his tigers with merely a whip and his words.

1–And during one particular performance, the worst possible thing happened: the lights went completely out in the arena, leaving both the audience and the trainer in complete, utter darkness.

2–Now, you may know that Bengal tigers are well-known for their ability to see in the dark, so there was real fear that harm might come to the trainer, locked in that cage.

3–But after about 30 long, dark seconds, the lights came back on, the trainer was fine, and he calmly finished his act.

4–In an interview later, someone asked him how he felt during that experience. And even though he admitted to being scared at first, he said *“I just kept cracking my whip and talking to them until the lights came on, and they never knew that I couldn’t see them as well as they could see me.”*<sup>2</sup>

C–Friends, fear can only control *us* when *we* give it the power to do so.

1–Yes, there are many “tigers in the dark” that we could be afraid of in our world today: fear of losing our loved ones; fear of losing our job; fear of failure; fear of success; fear of loneliness or rejection; fear of terrorism; and so on.

2–But whatever fears we face, I believe that if we’ll learn to understand and use it as such, Easter can be the “whip” & the “words” (so to speak) that can keep fear at bay.

D–You see, for the person of faith, fear has no ultimate power – *FEAR falls behind us*, just as surely as a cocoon that gets discarded when the butterfly emerges.<sup>3</sup>

E–So whatever it is that you and I are fearful of today, Easter reminds us: *“Do not be afraid!”*

5. A second way to talk about the true/“inside” meaning of Easter is to say that because of Easter, **HOPE STRIDES AHEAD OF US**.

A–I don’t know about you, but in my experience there are many people in today’s world (perhaps some here today) who’re like Charlie Brown in the “Peanuts” cartoon where Lucy is explaining her philosophy of life.

1– [Not to be confused with Forest Gump], she says that *“Life is like a deck chair: Some people face it forward so they can see where they’re going; while others face it backwards so they can see where they’ve been.”*

2–And Charlie Brown simply responds, *“I can’t even mine unfolded!”*

B–Well, there’s a lot of us who’re like that – it’s great that other people seem to have life all neatly packaged and figured out, but *we’re* just struggling to get the “deck chair” of *our* lives unfolded all by ourselves, trying to make it to the next day without falling apart!

C–Well, what we’ve need to know and understand about Easter is that we’re never alone.

1–Remember what the angels tell the women at the tomb in Verse 7? ...*“Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and... is going before you to Galilee; [and] there you will see him.”*

2–Friends, I believe that just as surely as the risen Christ literally walked ahead of these women in *their* time of confusion, promising to be *with* them on their journey back to tell the other disciples,...

3–...So I believe Jesus will spiritually go before *us*, as well, promising to be with *us* in all the confusion and stress and hectic pace of life’s journey as we try to share and do God’s will.

D–Easter, you see, is about a *HOPE that strides/goes ahead of/before us* so that we’re never, ever alone in whatever it is we have to face along life’s travels. <sup>4</sup>

6. A final way I want to describe the true/“inside” meaning of Easter today is to say that in Easter, **LOVE WINS FOR US** – that death/evil do *not* have the final word/say in life!

A–And yet, isn’t that precisely what we sometimes think (or at least feel) today? We see death, destruction, terrorism, violence, scandal, and starvation on TV and the internet, and we wonder where God is?!

B–What we’re forgetting is that these “things of death and evil” are never the last word or the end of the story for a person of faith.

1–How does the angel put it to the women in Verse 6? ...“*I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.*”

2–Or what about the words of Paul later in the New Testament, “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

3–Or the words of one wise African-American preacher, “*It may feeeeel like Friday. But I’m here to tell ya’ that Sunday’s on the way!*”

4–Or what about the words of 3-year old Nicole, who was asked by her mom and dad if she knew the meaning of Easter. And in her own sweet, simple way, she raised her arms, smiled, and at the top of her voice exclaimed, “*Surprise!*” <sup>5</sup>

C–Friends, that’s it! Easter means that despite outward appearances to the contrary, ... “*Surprise! Sunday’s on the way! Resurrection and Goodness win in the end, so that we can have life both now and forever!*”

1–Are you looking for and allowing God’s love to win in *your* heart and life? Or are you giving up before the end of the game?

2–At Easter, you see, *LOVE wins for us...* on *our* behalf!

3–It did then. And it can still today, IF we’ll allow it to do so!

7. So again, what's the *true meaning* (the “inside” meaning”) of Easter?

A—According to today's scripture, Easter means that no matter what we experience in this life, when we follow the risen Savior,...

- 1– *FEAR falls behind us,*
- 2– *HOPE strides ahead of us,*
- 3– *And LOVE wins for us.*

B—Let me summarize in the words of a famous 1970s praise song,... **[I Sing or say...]**

*“Because he lives I can face tomorrow; Because he lives all fear is gone.  
Because I know he holds the future,  
Life is worth the living, just because he lives.”* <sup>6</sup>

8. [PRAYER]

9. [CLOSING MUSIC: MEDLEY: One Verse of “Because He Lives” (UMH#364), then all Verses of “Crown Him With Many Crowns” (UMH#327); OR Praise Song “From the Inside Out”]

#### **ENDNOTES:**

1. For example, Verse 4's reference to the “*fear of the guards*” is followed by Verse 5's reference to the angel telling the women “*Do not be afraid,*” and Verse 8's reference to the women leaving the tomb “*with fear*” is followed by Verse 10's reference to Jesus telling them “*Do not be afraid.*”

2. Story from Thomas Lane Butts, Tigers in the Dark, cited in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 205.

3. Speaking about the power of Fear, author Max Lucado says that “*His modus operandi is to manipulate you with the mysterious, [and] to taunt you with the unknown. Fear of death, fear of failure, fear of God, fear of tomorrow-his arsenal is vast. His goal? To create cowardly, joyless souls. He doesn't want you [and I] to make the journey to the mountain. He figures if he can rattle [us] enough, [we] will take [our] eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands*” [Max L. Lucado, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entry #9371].

And yet, for the Christian, fear has no ultimate power because our destinies are controlled by something great than it. As theologian Karl Barth once explained, “*The Easter message tells us that our enemies, sin, the curse, and death, are beaten. Ultimately they can no longer start mischief. They still behave as though the game were not decided, the battle not fought; we must still reckon with them, but fundamentally we must cease to fear them any more* [Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, cited in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 168].

4. Psalm 23:4 puts it this way, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me.*”

5. Story in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 162.

6. Lyrics from “*Because He Lives*” by William & Gloria Gaither, in our United Methodist Hymnal #364.