These times of “self-isolation” that we find ourselves in today can put a lot of stress and strain on our relationships.

Someone told me this week that there have been over 500 domestic violence calls in Phoenix.

**Along those lines, I read something funny last week…,**

where a young lady hadn’t seen her next door neighbors outside for a couple of weeks, so she decided to go over and check on them.

Her elderly neighbor let her in and they began chatting.

She realized she hadn’t seen the husband, so she asked where he was…

To which the wife responded; “he’s in the Garden”. The younger neighbor responded, I looked before I came over and I didn’t see him.

To which the wife responded with a deadpan face; “Look deeper!”

**We’re going to be in John 20:1-10 this Easter Sunday…**

(I would encourage you to read the entire chapter with your family later – as many families do with Luke 2 at Christmas time).

What does God want us to believe through John’s eyewitness account of the first Easter Sunday? **Jesus is RISEN!**

Why does God want us to believe that? 1 Cor 15:16-17

God isn’t asking anyone to “check their brains at the door” to believe in the Resurrection of His Son…

**He would much prefer that our faith be based on reasonable truth.**

**Because belief based on truth often** produces strong, faithful believers, who can stand against the attacks of the enemy, Satan,

As well as weather the storms of this life caused by death & disease that are all rooted in sin.

Jesus Himself used logic and reason in His Great Sermon on the Mount when He said to His followers (Matthew 6:25-34;)

**This is the pastor Ralph paraphrased version**

“I know you’re worrying about a lot of things right now, but have you ever stopped to think that if God takes care of the birds of the air (who don’t worry) and the clothes the fields with beautiful grass and wildflowers… won’t He also take care of you, because you are **MUCH** more important to Him than they are?

He says the cure for worry is “seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven, living a righteous life that represents faith in Christ well… Knowing that He will provide everything you need.”

As we do that today, let me briefly remind us of the events that have brought us to John’s eyewitness account of Jesus’ Resurrection.

* The Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (last Sunday), fulfilling the Messianic prophesy written hundreds of years earlier in Zachariah 9:9.
* Jesus’ Last Supper with His disciples (Maundy Thursday).
* After which Jesus allowed Himself to be betrayed with a kiss, arrested, falsely tried, beaten beyond recognition and willingly crucified, on what we celebrate as “Good Friday”. Fulfilling many more Messianic prophecies.

When the Roman soldiers were done with Jesus that Friday, we can be certain that Jesus was dead.

Because Sabbat (Sabbath) was about to begin at sundown, so the Roman soldiers hastened the death of those on the cross by breaking their legs, not allowing them to push themselves up **to get air**, causing them to die of asphyxiation.

John tells us in **chapter 19:33**, that when the soldiers came to Jesus, they did not break His legs, because they found that He was already dead. **Which fulfilled yet another Messianic prophecy.**

In John 19:38-42, he explains that it was Joseph of Arimathea who sought Pilate for the the body of Jesus, to prepare His body for burial according to Jewish custom. Nicodemus helped him anoint the body of Christ for burial and placed Jesus in a new tomb, in the garden near Golgotha.

Once Jesus was placed in the tomb all work CEASED until the Sabbath was over Saturday evening. Which we can better understand these days.

**Read - Matthew 28:62-66 - The tomb was sealed with the governor’s seal and guards were posted.**

**John 20**

V1 When Mary Magdalene and others arrived (according to the other Gospel accounts), arrived that first Easter Sunday morning… it was still dark, where they there for a front row seat at the sunrise service?

No…They were there early Sunday morning, because it was their first opportunity since the Sabbath ended to pay their last respects to their friend Jesus of Nazareth.

To deal with the business of death. To ensure that Christ is dealt with properly.

And the discovery of the empty tomb absolutely freaks them out!

In V2 of John 20, they run off to tell Simon Peter and the “other disciple” John (the writer of this Gospel), that Jesus’ tomb was empty…

Their assumption (we’re told)… is that someone had stolen the body of Christ!

The empty tomb triggered **no thoughts** of the Resurrection.

Instead of Divine intervention, they assumed that there had to have been some kind of “human interference”.

It would have been a good time for the disciples to explain to the women that this was in fact the Resurrection that Jesus said was going to happen three times before…

Which then would have given them cause to “celebrate” and have Easter dinner!!

But how does it say the disciples responded to the women? Luke 24:11 - says the disciples thought the account of the women seemed like idle tales, **and they didn’t believe them.**

Meaning the disciples themselves either had **forgotten**, **didn’t believe**, or **didn’t understand** Jesus’ teaching on the Resurrection themselves.

Had they believed, the ladies likely would have found Peter & John that first Easter morning drinking coffee and singing; “Because He Lives!”

**But where were they… hiding!** They were frightened, defeated, locked in a room, believing they were the next ones to be crucified now that the Sabbath was over.

So in order to **verify** or **disprove** the account of these women, Peter and John take off like a shot to the tomb. **John outruns Peter…**

**John gives us his eyewitness testimony in V5,** that in getting there before Peter, he stood outside looking in and saw the strips of linen cloth that Jesus’ body had been wrapped with.

**V6-7** Peter finally shows up… gasping for air… and we’re told that in typical Peter fashion, he boldly charges into the tomb to see.

But if the deduction of Mary is right…, that someone had stolen Jesus’ body… why would grave robbers take the time to unwrap the dead body?

Typically when a thief shows up to steal something, they want to get in and out as quickly as possible.

**And how could they defeat the Roman guards to get the body?**

For those who believe Jesus just rose thru the linen strips… Why didn’t Jesus do that to Lazarus when he rose him from the dead in John 11?

Peter turns to John and said something like; “you should go in there and check this out!” The head cloth is laying separate from the body wrapping!

**In V8 John tells us that it was enough to make a believer out of him!**

The he is humble enough to record that they (the one’s who had walked and talked with Jesus for 3-1/2 years) had not understood that Jesus said He had to rise from the dead!

Sometimes that happens with God’s people. We won’t be to hard on them… But it’s an AMAZING DAY when that “Awakening” occurs!

This is a dramatic/Hallelujah! Christ is rising in John moment!!

The reality of every Easter Service is that not everyone believes…

**So now I turn to you, a lone juror, the only one who can decide this case for yourself…**

You can believe the Resurrection of Jesus to be **FACT** or **FICTION**, but you cannot believe **both**.

The empty tomb itself cannot **prove** or **disprove** the claim of the Resurrection by itself. **It as circumstantial evidence.**

Why didn’t the Jews who hated Jesus so much, just put this whole issue to rest once and for all… **by producing His body?**

**But no one did!** In fact the counter evidence provided by the Jews… came by way of them going to the Roman soldiers, and paying them money to create a story that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus.

The problem was… the Roman soldiers were the one’s responsible for guarding the dead body of Jesus. **They were in enough trouble!**

Making it clear that the Jewish leaders were equally convinced that the tomb was empty.

The rest of John’s Gospel provides more eye witness accounts (which I encourage all of you to read this afternoon).

If you read all of the Gospel records you will discover that not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but he spent 40 more days convincing and teaching His disciples…

Over 500 witnesses were gathered with Him on the sea shore (Matt 28)

Before you decide, however, I encourage you to think about this… If the Gospel records were “made up”… Why would the writers decide to make the foundational witnesses women!

Because the testimony of women at that time was viewed as “inadmissable” and irrelevant!

**Yet the Gospel writers state it was;**

* The women who discovered the empty tomb,
* The women who tell the disciples
* It would be the women, to whom Jesus would appear to first… later that morning…

That’s a pretty poor strategy, to try and convince the world that Jesus had risen…

And what about the men who testified??? Uneducated fisherman, a tax collector, and the like… who in their right mind would believe them?

Dee and I have been watching John Grisham’s movies in our time of isolation… Lawyers/court room drama/ etc…

And one of the things that I’ve learned from his movies is, **if you want to win your case…**

make sure the witnesses you call to testify, **have nothing to gain.**

They will have more credibility, versus the one who just had $100 shekels deposited into their account before they took the stand.

What did the disciples **GAIN** for testifying to the empty tomb and the risen Christ? Suffering, abuse, arrest, and in most cases painful death!

The Bible says they didn’t expect a resurrection, so why would they invent one? They didn’t!

Some might say; “there are “religious fanatics” that die all the time for things they have “invented” or simply **believe** to be true… and that is correct!”

However, these disciples were in a position to absolutely **KNOW** whether the cause for which they were prepared to give their lives, was **TRUE** or **not.**

As a pre-Christian, I can remember believing that the disciples must have known that the Resurrection wasn’t true… it was just a made up story to “save face and gain followers.”

Which meant they would have had to stay true to their **untruth** all the way to their death. Drawn & quartered, stabbed with swords, beheaded, crucified (John himself was boiled in oil)…

Would you die for something you knew to be untrue?

**I’ve heard many a pastor rightly say;** a person may be willing to die for a “conviction”, but not a “concoction”!

What the disciples went through and the worldwide movement that has taken place as a result…

the fact that our time, calendars, laws, government, much of our world is based on Christ & the Word of God!!

Is **EXTREME** “proof of the Resurrection of Christ”.

**In John 20:30-31 –** John states his **intention** for why he has not only recorded this event…, but his entire Gospel.

In his closing argument…, to help you the readers/hearers with any lingering issues of doubt & unbelief…

His stated intention is to present the **facts**, for you to base your belief on **FACT,** Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing… you can discover the reason that you were created… to have a living relationship with the God of the Universe.

It has been said that those who reject Jesus, and His offer of new life, new hope, and eternal life, do so **not** because they **have** considered the evidence and found it lacking, but because they have **never** considered the evidence.

John 3 – The great teacher of the Law, Nicodemus (who ultimately helped lay Jesus in the tomb) discovered that you can’t be so good that you don’t need Jesus.

John 4 – The woman at the well, with her messed up life, 5 ex-husbands and now living with a guy, discovered that you can’t be so bad that Jesus can’t save you, and make you holy…

**John 3:16**

Will the jurors rise please?

Now it is your time to decide… based on the evidence presented to you today…

**John expects a response from us –** Did Jesus, the Christ, rise from the dead on the third day as He said He would?

What sayeth you, the Jury?

Do you believe?

Do you want to believe?

Because no amount of factual evidence will ever change the mind of someone who doesn’t.

**Romans 10:9-10**

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

**Please bow your heads**

If you want to believe in Christ as Savior and allow Him to be the Lord of your life, I’m going lead you in a prayer to receive the risen Christ today. **Simply repeat after me:**

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank You for Jesus!

Please forgive my unbelief.

I believe Jesus is Your Son!

I believe He died for my sin!

I believe You raised Him to life!

I need Him to come into my heart!

I want others to see…

The proof of His life in me. In Jesus name! Amen

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

If you have prayed that prayer and meant it with your whole heart, the Bible says that **God has “adopted you into His family”.**

We believe that you **can and should** be assured of your Salvation in Christ.

But we also believe that God has created and saved you for a **“holy life”** that you need…

If you made a decision for Christ today via Facebook Live, please like our video today and leave comment stating that you did. I would like to reach-out to you, to talk to you about “new believer growth materials”

But no matter what decision you made today, God the Father, His Son Jesus, and His Holy Spirit want you to know that you are loved more than you can know on this side of heaven. **Jesus died and rose for you!**

The question before you today is are you willing to LIVE for something that is ABSOLUTELY TRUE?