

The Awe of Easter

Mark 16:1-8

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It comes down to this

Jesus is at the center

He has victory over the grave

There's one historical reality: the Resurrection of Jesus!

I wonder if we've stopped marveling at the miracle of Easter. While our culture is captivated by the Easter Bunny and marshmallow Peeps, a few creative families have been coloring potatoes or painting rocks this year because eggs are so expensive.

For some of us, we're so focused on being amused and entertained, we're simply not moved by the enormity of the empty tomb.

Many years ago, thanks to a generous gift from our previous church, our family had unlimited access to a brand-new indoor amusement park for a weekend getaway. Complete with nine full-size rides, flashing lights and loud music, it felt like a county fair, except the rides seemed newer and there were no deep-fried Twinkies.

As we waited in line for the first ride, I announced to the entire family that I was going to go on every one of them. Our girls were amused by this because they know I get queasy on rides.

As I jammed myself into a colorful plane held up by a couple pieces of dental floss, I smiled bravely to our youngest daughter, and we took off. It didn't take long for me to feel sick, so I took some deep breaths and prayed like mad. When I stumbled off the ride, our girls chuckled as I told them that I was finished at the amusement park.

Later that night, we returned, and hoping I could regain my man card, I eyed a little kiddy ride in the corner and decided to try again. This time my wife and another daughter strapped in next to me and we took off...and so did my stomach. Beth told me to look straight ahead, but when I did, my insides almost came outside. At first, I thought I could make it to the end, but quickly realized I was already at the end.

She tried to get the operator's attention while I closed my eyes, put my head down and prayed like mad. The worker finally shut it down and I stumbled over to a bench while Beth dragged a garbage can next to me.

My adventures at the amusement park have become part of our family lore as our daughters still remind me that I almost lost my lunch on a kiddy ride.

It strikes me that many today are just going through life wanting to be amused. Some of us are seeking every thrill we can find, while others have realized this quest doesn't ultimately satisfy and even leaves us feeling a bit sick inside. You and I have a choice to make. *We can go through life seeking to be amused, or we can be amazed by awe.*

Forty years ago, in his book called, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman argued that our entertainment-driven culture has trivialized public discourse, transforming serious issues into superficial spectacles. We've only gone downward from there in the last four decades.

Here's what I hope we learn today: *Instead of amusing ourselves to death, let's live in awe of Jesus, who came back to life in order to give us life.*

When individuals encountered Jesus after the resurrection, they were filled with astonishment and awe. I wonder if we've become so familiar with Jesus that we've lost our fear of Him. Our awareness of the content of Christianity can numb us to the astonishing nature of the cross and the empty tomb. To say it another way, Easter is not just a holiday; it the holiest of days.

Recently, I came across a new word called, "wonderlessness," first used by Mark Buchanan in his book called, *Your God is Too Safe: Rediscovering the Wonder of a God You Can't Control*. He defines "wonderlessness" as the state of lacking wonder, awe, or curiosity. It describes a mindset or condition where we feel disconnected from amazement because we're seeking to amuse ourselves to death. Recent research indicates how scrolling mindlessly through videos on TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube can paradoxically lead to increased feelings of boredom rather than an alleviation of those feelings. Wonderlessness is often linked to apathy, cynicism, and complacency, which can dull our senses and lull us into spiritual paralysis.

Those who interacted with Jesus in the gospels were never passive or bored with Him. It was impossible to be apathetic or just ignore Him. Jesus made people angry, astonished, amazed, in awe, or afraid. People fought against Him, or they put their faith in Him. The same is true today. You will reject Him, or you will receive Him. There's no middle ground.

Here are just a few reactions to Jesus from the Gospel of Mark.

- “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves” (1:27).
- “And they were filled with great fear” (4:41).
- “But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before Him (5:33).
- “And they were overcome with amazement” (5:42-43).
- “And many who heard Him were astonished” (6:2).
- “And they took offense at Him” (6:3).
- “For they all saw Him and were terrified...and they were utterly astounded” (6:50-51).
- “And they were astonished beyond measure” (7:37).
- “For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified” (9:6).
- “And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to Him and greeted Him” (9:15).
- “And they marveled at Him” (12:17).

Awe and amazement were common responses to the worth and work of Jesus. This is clearly seen in Luke 5:26: “***And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’***”

Awe can be defined as “*fear mingled with reverence.*” English Bible translations use the words “awe” or “awesome” almost exclusively to refer to the person or power of God. When confronted with God’s awesome presence, the inevitable human response is to quiver and cower. In fact, the Bible never records a direct personal encounter with God in which the individual was not visibly shaken by the awesomeness of the Almighty.

This makes me wonder, where’s the sense of awe and astonishment in my life today? Paul David Tripp writes, “*Where you look for awe will shape the direction of your life...misplaced awe keeps us perennially dissatisfied. Perhaps in ways*

that you have never come close to considering, your dissatisfaction is an awe problem.”

People had a sense of awe toward the Savior when He was alive. We also see this sense of wonder when He died on the cross for our sins. According to Matthew 27:54, after the death of Jesus, when the curtain in the temple was torn in two, an earthquake took place, and the bodies of believers were raised from their graves, we read this: ***“When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’”*** After being filled with awe, He accepted who Jesus was.

Instead of amusing ourselves to death, let’s live in awe of Jesus, who came back to life in order to give us life.

The empty tomb caused an explosion of awe for three women that first Easter morning.

Let’s walk through the passage that Matt read earlier from Mark 16. ***“When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb [where they would see that the Son had risen!] ³ And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’ ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.”*** According to Mark 15:40, when Jesus was crucified, these same women ***“looked on from a distance”*** as Jesus died an extremely brutal death. Mark 15 ends by telling us they ***“saw where He was laid.”***

After waiting until the Sabbath was over, the three women bought spices, including myrrh (think back to one of the gifts of the wise men). They woke up early on Sunday to anoint the dead body of Jesus. As they got closer, they realized they didn’t have a plan for how to roll the exceedingly large stone away from the entrance. With heads bowed with grief, their steps slowed with sadness, with eyes downcast and hearts heavy with loss, they looked up and saw the stone had already been rolled back! The women carried their spices, symbols of death, not knowing that death itself had already been defeated!

Matthew 28:4 tells us about the Roman guards outside the tomb who ***“became like dead men.”*** After stepping around the comatose soldiers, Mark 16:5 says: ***“And***

entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.” When they went inside the tomb, Luke 24:3 tells us *“they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”* Luke describes two angels, but here Mark focuses on one messenger who was dressed in *“a white”* or *“bright”* robe. Matthew 28:3 fills in more detail: *“His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow.”* Luke 24:4 describes his clothing as *“dazzling apparel.”*

They experienced horror at not finding the body of Jesus while encountering the holiness of the angel. It’s no wonder they were *“alarmed.”* This word means, *“to be utterly amazed and overwhelmingly distressed; to shake and be beside themselves in alarming astonishment.”* Luke 24:5 says they collapsed in terror: *“they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground.”* The awe of that moment was not just in the angel’s appearance but in the profound truth that death had been defeated.

Mark 16:6 records the words of the angel, *“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* The angel knew they were looking for Jesus, so he told them the good news that Jesus had risen and was no longer in the tomb. To help them process all this, he pointed to the place where the body had been laid.

The preserved body of Vladimir Lenin has been on display in a mausoleum in Moscow for over 100 years. The look of his body has been maintained through meticulous preservation techniques, including treatments with chemical solutions. Not long after the death of the founder of the Soviet Union, a popular poet tried to soothe the grieving country with these words: *“Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live.”*

When Lenin died in 1924, the Communist leaders were terrified their regime would come toppling down after his death, so they decided to put his body on display to demonstrate how Lenin and his teachings would live on.

All of this was done to prop up the Soviet leader and the things he taught to give him the sense of having an eternal quality. Over the last 100 years, tens of millions of people have visited Lenin’s tomb, some out of curiosity, but many more out of devotion to their dead leader.

Over time, Lenin’s body has morphed into something macabre as scientists attempt to stay ahead of the natural decay and decomposition process. Alexei Yurchak,

professor of social anthropology at the University of California, writes, “*They have to substitute occasional parts of skin and flesh with plastics and other materials, so in terms of the original biological matter the body is less and less of what it used to be.*”

Recently, there’s been a growing call to bury the plasticized body of Lenin, but one well-known Russian leader made this incredible admission: “*Lenin’s interment would mean that they’ve been worshipping false ideals, set false goals and that their lives have been lived in vain.*”

What are they basing all their hopes, their worship, their goals and their lives on? All I see is a dead man. Not the smallest flicker of life. His heart isn’t beating, his lungs don’t take in air, his brain isn’t functioning, there’s no blood running through his veins. Lenin’s not there. His body is an empty shell made up of plastic and other materials.

Aren’t you glad that Jesus did not stay dead? All that He taught and said is true, and we don’t need to prop any of it up. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus said, “***I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.***”

Interestingly, there’s a lot of speculation about when Lenin’s body will finally be buried. My guess is it will happen when they get tired of propping up a dead corpse.

Jesus has risen, not metaphorically or symbolically, but physically, triumphantly, forever. This is the central truth of our faith as 1 Corinthians 15:17 says: “***And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.***”

After examining the evidence, the angel tells them in verse 7 to share this good news with others: “***But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.***” Last Easter, we focused on how Jesus restored Peter after he had failed and bailed on Him. He can do the same for you this Easter.

Even though the women were given a clear commission, their immediate response was one of awe and uncertainty in verse 8: “***And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.***” This miracle was so startling, so outside the realm of what they understood to be possible, that it left them trembling and bewildered. Having been in the presence of something miraculous and entrusted with an

unbelievable message, they were shaken to their cores and fled in fear. The sheer magnitude and unexpectedness of what they saw left them in a state of shock and awe.

Let's walk through this verse phrase-by-phrase.

- **Fled from the tomb.** To *“flee”* means, *“to move hastily as if from danger; to escape as quickly as possible from the unexpected.”*
- **For trembling.** This word refers to *“reverential awe, deep dread, and terrifying fear.”* These women were used to births and deaths, but not resurrections.
- **And astonishment.** This has the idea of *“beyond belief, bewilderment, amazement, and wonder.”* It's also translated as *“sacred ecstasy by having all senses suspended.”* They struggled to fully comprehend what had just occurred and were in awe at being eyewitnesses to an act of God that changed all of history!
- **Had seized them.** Fear, trembling, and astonishment were *“controlling them,”* or more literally, *“holding them fast.”*
- **And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.** These women were *“hushed to holy silence.”* Using a double negative, this means they couldn't speak to even one person because words failed them. Their silence was a natural reaction to the enormity of what they just witnessed. We know they eventually shared the good news, but their immediate reaction was to go mute in the presence of majesty.

Aren't you glad that the message of the resurrection can never be silenced? The words, ***“He has risen! He is not here!”*** have echoed throughout history and into this holy moment right now.

It's time for us to be in awe of the resurrection. Sometimes we forget just how stunning the empty tomb really is because we've lived our whole lives in the afterglow of its reality. As John Stott said, *“God performed a dramatic act by which He arrested the process of decay, decomposition, and corruption...never to die again.”*

What's your response to Jesus? Have you made the decision to follow Him?
What's your reaction to what He has done for you?

I wonder, are you ready to get off the amusement ride of life and begin an amazing relationship with the One who came to give you abundant life?

C.S. Lewis was perceptive when he wrote: *“Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”*

As we consider the empty tomb, we don't have to be afraid, but we are called to be in awe of its massive implications. Easter is not just about what happened to Jesus; it is also about what must happen to us.

There are at least four results of the resurrection.

1. **Peace.** Just as the angel told the women in Mark 16:6 not to be afraid, so too Jesus calms us by His presence. Jesus came to bring reconciliation and forgiveness so we can be at peace with God the Father. When Jesus appeared to His frightened followers after the resurrection, He spoke these comforting words in John 20:19: *“Peace be with you.”*
2. **Purpose.** Life now has meaning and purpose as Jesus said in John 10:10: *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*
3. **Power.** Philippians 3:10 tells us the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, defeated the devil, and conquered our depravity is available to us today: *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...”* Death didn't voluntarily give up Jesus, death was destroyed by Jesus.
4. **Presence.** In Matthew 28:20, Jesus made this promise, *“And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Someone put it like this: *“A Christian is someone who can say: If I die tomorrow, I'll be with Jesus. If I don't, He'll be with me.”*

When you surrender to Him as Lord, get ready for the ride of your life.

Few things are more awesome than seeing Jesus make a spiritually dead person come alive right before your eyes! Maybe that dead person will be you today.

Are you in awe of what happened on Easter? We should tremble before a holy and awesome God! Have you ever thought about what the word “awful” means? It

comes from the combination of “awe” (a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear) and the suffix “ful” (indicating fullness or abundance).

Historically, “awe-ful” described something that evoked profound reverence or wonder, often with a positive connotation (for example, “the awful majesty of God”). Over time, its meaning shifted to emphasize something extremely bad, unpleasant, or terrible (for example, “an awful smell”).

Friends, it’s an “awful” thing to face the judgment of an “awe-ful” and awesome God. This is stated clearly in Hebrews 10:31: ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*** Our sins have created a separation between us and Him and because we’re sinners, we deserve death and judgment. If we refuse Jesus as Savior, we’ll face Him one day as Judge.

The good news is that God’s righteous and holy justice was poured out on Christ, our final sacrifice! His resurrection means that sin, guilt, shame, addiction, pain, and death do not have the final word in our lives.

Death was proof that Jesus was human. Resurrection was proof that He is God. The Resurrection confirms that Jesus took our rottenness and exchanged it for His righteousness. Because of that exchange, you can be changed right now by repenting and receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Because Jesus is alive again, you can be born again as 1 Peter 1:3 says: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”***

Romans 10:9 teaches that we must confess Christ as our risen Lord in order to be saved: ***“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”***

I like how Ron Hutchcraft explains the impact of Easter, *“Jesus walked out of His grave so He can walk into your life.”* In John 11:25-26, Jesus declared to Martha, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die...”*** Jesus personalizes this by asking a direct question to her and to each of us: ***“Do you believe this?”***

Are you ready to allow the awe of Easter to urgently move you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior? It's time to revere, repent, and then receive the Resurrected One! The empty tomb demands a response! I think of what Thomas said in John 20:28 when he came face-to-face with Jesus after the resurrection: ***“My Lord and my God!”***

I want you to know you've been prayed for. This past week, we launched a Prayer Initiative by praying around the clock for 36 hours in 15-minute prayer segments. People filled 144 times of prayer focused on you placing your faith in Christ during our services. We also encouraged people to put initials and names of those they invited on a vinyl prayer board in the south lobby. There are over 200 people on the board, maybe you're one of them. Our staff and deacons have spent time praying for each name.

If you're ready to repent and be born again right now, you could pray this prayer with me.

“God, I am in awe of your awesomeness. I confess I am an awful sinner. I know my sins are rancid and repugnant to You. I deserve Your righteous judgment because I am unrighteous. I'm tired of living with a void in my life, being consumed by my own sins while seeking to be amused. I repent from how I've been living and I'm ready to receive You so I can be born again. Thank You for dying for my sins in my place, as my substitute. I confess Jesus is Lord and believe in my heart You raised Him from the dead. Please forgive me for all my sins. I believe and now I receive. I surrender everything to You. In the name of the Resurrected One, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer, would you have the courage to raise your hand so we can rejoice with you? Please take the “Next Steps” card in front of you and check the box which says, *“I've decided to follow Jesus.”*

Our worship team is going to lead us in a closing song called, “Come to Jesus.” You'll have some time to fill out this card before Pastor Chad asks us to stand. When the service is over, please take the card out to the lobby to exchange it for a gift bag. Or you can drop it one of the offering boxes.

Instead of amusing ourselves to death, let's live in awe of Jesus, who came back to life in order to give us life.

*There's room for us all at the foot of the cross
Where perfect love paid every prodigal's cost*

*The Savior is waiting with arms open wide
So, leave what's behind you behind
You don't have to clean up before you come home
Come to Jesus
Come now and be saved*

Closing Song

In 1930, a Russian atheist named Nicholai Ivanovich addressed a huge assembly on the topic of atheism. He spoke for one hour trying to dismantle Christianity. When he finished, he looked out at the crowd and asked if anyone had any questions. Silence filled the auditorium.

Just then, one man got out of his chair, came up to the platform, and stood right next to the communist leader. He looked at the crowd and shouted out an ancient greeting that was well known to many Russians: “*Christ is risen!*” The people immediately rose to their feet and responded thunderously: “*He is risen indeed!*”

Let's end our Easter service in a spirit of awe by proclaiming that Christ *is* risen!

I'll say, “Christ is risen!” and you respond with, “He is risen indeed!”

*Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!*

Amen and Amen.