

NOT NEGOTIABLE: Mission

At least to my self-assessment, I'm a pretty easy-going guy, a live-and-let live person who believes you can believe whatever you want to believe. I might agree or disagree with your beliefs, but you are certainly entitled to hold them.

We're a pretty easy-going church in that regard. We don't draw a lot of lines for you to toe in order to be welcome here. We figure you're on a spiritual journey, just as we are. We're not going to direct your every move in life. In our teaching and preaching, we'll make some suggestions, we hope, backed up by Scripture, but the final choices are always yours.

That's our usual practice. But for our new sermon series that begins today, we take - at least I take - a harder line. Still not going to order you around - obviously. But I am going to take a harder line, something that's probably obvious in the series' title, "Not Negotiable." The premise of this series is that there are characteristics and qualities and attributes and lifestyle matters from which our faith will not back down. If you don't have the items in this series built into your beliefs and the way you live, you're certainly welcome to keep coming here - nothing about our welcome to you will change if you tell us you disagree with one or more of them - but I will tell you there is something fundamental missing in your faith, and from that position I won't budge.

For example, to kick off the series today I want us to think about what happens AFTER a big religious holiday like Easter... or Christmas, for that matter.

What happened in the resurrection? The disciples and many others met a man they saw die on a cross. That's pretty stunning stuff - not an everyday occurrence. Here's the important question for today: What did Jesus tell them to do after God raised him from the dead? It's in Matthew 28 (18-20), verses you've heard countless times.... After they experienced the thrill, the excitement, the shock, and the surprise of a man who was dead brought back to life, the disciples were told to go teach and tell the world about Jesus.

The Apostle Peter met Jesus after the resurrection. It's the scene in which Jesus three times asked Peter whether he loved him - to mimic the three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus before Jesus went to the cross. At the end of his meeting with Peter, Jesus had a two word command - follow me. Don't stop. Don't go back home and put your faith in storage. Follow me. Don't think you're done with living the way I want you to live just because I'm no longer living in earth with you. Follow me.

Saul persecuted Christians, executed Christians. He met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. The experience left him blinded. But that's not all that happened. When he got his sight back he also got a mission - to tell the world about Jesus.

The very last verse in the Gospel of Luke tells us what the disciples did with their time after Jesus left them and went to heaven (24.53).... They didn't go back to their previous lifestyles. They didn't forget all the impact Jesus had had on them. They spent their time in worship.

The point is simply that the resurrection wasn't a one and done experience. It is in modern churches - where attendance spikes for one Sunday, then returns to normal the next week - but in the Bible the resurrection changed the way people lived. Those who met Jesus resurrected, lived for him, spoke for him, worked for him, served for him, loved for him and did it all in his name. In short, they all were on a mission.

Something similar happens all the time in the Bible. Encounters with heaven change the course of people's lives. What happened to Moses after he met God in the burning bush? Those spectacular special effects led to Moses' leading slaves out of Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land. Moses' encounter with the living God didn't end when he walked away from the bush. It began when he walked away from the bush.

Let's move back in time, before the resurrection. Peter, James, and John go onto a mountain with Jesus, where they see a stunning thing - Moses and Elijah, of Old Testament fame, appear and speak with Jesus. Not just one guy who died but came back to life, but two. How much better than THAT can it get? Yet when they came back down the mountain from that glorious experience, what they found was a desperate father whose son other disciples could not heal. Jesus healed the boy, then told the disciples they needed more faith. Even though they had just seen something few other humans would ever see, they weren't done yet. They had room to grow, room to improve, room to strengthen their faith.

What about my favorite Bible character, Job? At the end of the story, Job has an awe-inspiring encounter with God. Remarkable. But when God leaves, what happens to Job? He returns to the life he had spent the entire book complaining about. He won't be allowed to return to the protests of previous chapters. He has to move on, live differently.

That's the word I have for you today. The resurrection we celebrated last week didn't end spiritual enthusiasm. (It may have for some of us! But that's our fault, not the resurrection's.) The resurrection didn't excuse us from Christian living. It wasn't the only date we were to be in church. It didn't end anything. It started us on a new life. It started us on a mission to tell people about Jesus. It started us - yet again - as people who speak in his name, serve in his name, give in his name, love in his name, and live in his name.

It's so appropriate that a team from our church will prepare and serve the churches United meal site this week, where we will serve in his name. That's what people who have been to the empty tomb do.

Baptisms are another stirring spiritual experience. Baptisms are sweet, but too often they're the final objective, rather than a next step. People get baptized. Family and friends gather to witness the event. It's a happening worth shouting about! But then nothing happens afterwards. People return to the lives they were living, as if nothing had happened. But baptism is so much more than that.

You and I must not walk away from the empty tomb unchanged. The resurrection was meant as a signal of our power and authority to live differently, not as an invitation to begin down time. The resurrection delivered us a mission - to be the representatives of Jesus, the spokespeople for Jesus, to be the body of Jesus in the world. Today's "not negotiable" is just that. Biblically, spiritually, you and I don't have the freedom to walk away from Easter unchanged. And Easter Sunday cannot be a one and done moment. It's not negotiable. You're free to think you've done your spiritual business until Christmas if you like - lots of people in the country think so - but as a matter of faith, you don't have permission from heaven to do so.

What will you do this week to show the world, to show God, that Jesus is alive for you? How will you serve? How will you sacrifice? How will you make a difference to a wounded, broken world? How will you show the world that when you met Jesus, he changed, not just your eternal destiny, but also the way you lived from that moment on?

During the coming week, live like you know living differently as a follower of Jesus isn't a choice; live like you know it's not negotiable.