

I would imagine that, in many of your homes this weekend, you'll be holding that most wonderful of Easter traditions: an Easter egg hunt. The mad dash for sugary fulfillment and pastel glory, and maybe even a little cash. Every child knows that each of those plastic eggs are full of something good. But what would happen if they cracked open one of those eggs and found it to be...empty? What would they say? How would they react? This vessel that should have contained something of great value contained nothing but air. Was it a mistake? A bad April Fool's Day joke?

There are few words that express something negative more than "empty". Even the sound of the word is depressing. Think about the ways in which we use it: An empty feeling is one of hopelessness. Empty words are the expression of insincerity. Empty-handed means we have nothing. There is an emptiness that haunts my family; an empty stomach. It means we're starving, and my boys often considered it a sign of the apocalypse. We can have an empty bank account, an empty cupboard, and even an empty heart. Emptiness is no good.

And around 2,000 years ago, at that first Easter weekend, emptiness abounded. Imagine the emptiness Jesus' followers felt as the empty, lifeless body of their Messiah hung crucified on a cross. He was ultimately placed in a tomb, the resting place of the dead, and the ultimate symbol of emptiness. Their hope had been emptied as they were scattered and hiding in fear, and they were burdened with the empty feeling the mission failed. It was over. And if all that wasn't disheartening enough, three days after Jesus was crucified, some of his followers went to his tomb in the hopes of anointing his body with spices. And it was there where they were confronted with another instance of emptiness...this time it was an empty tomb.

As you can imagine, they were disturbed, thinking Jesus' body had been taken. But what they didn't realize was this emptiness was completely different than the emptiness they had been experiencing. Because, as they stood there in their confusion and grief, the Bible tells us that an angel appeared and asked a most interesting question, one that expressed that this emptiness was, in fact, good news. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen." The tomb was empty because its former occupant had been raised back to life. The emptiness of death had been overcome by the fullness of life. On this Resurrection Sunday, I want to talk about why the tomb was empty, and what it means for us. And I want us to see that ultimately, without emptiness, we can never be full.

The tomb was empty because Jesus was emptied.

A reading of the Gospels show Jesus as a man completely sold out for the mission he'd been sent to accomplish. Jesus poured himself out on our behalf, and the empty tomb was the glorious result of the life Jesus lived and the death Jesus died.

[PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8] ⁶ (Jesus) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

We often focus so much on the cross (and we should) that we lose sight of all that Jesus did to be our Savior. And he started just by showing up.

Jesus did not let his divinity get in the way of his mission of redemption. Equality with God wasn't something Jesus tried to fight for and hang on to. He left it behind. That doesn't mean he ceased to be God. It means he emptied himself of the divine trappings and privileges of heaven and humbled himself to come to earth. I want you to think of the absolute best place you've ever been, and then think of the absolute worst place you've ever been. For me that's the mountains of Banff and when I first get into my car after it's been sitting in a parking lot in the middle of summer. And then I want you to multiply by infinity, and that's the journey Jesus chose to take from heaven to earth. He definitely traded down.

He exchanged timelessness for time, an unlimited heavenly body for a limited physical body, and the worship and praise of angels for the mockery and rejection of man. In our age of an unending number of superhero movies, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that tells the true story of the most heroic act in history. He left the perfection of heaven and subjected himself to the fallen world he came to rescue.

Jesus emptied himself by coming in the form of a servant. He emptied himself of position. Imagine an organizational flow chart of the entire universe. For all eternity, Jesus is at the top of it, and then he comes to earth and is immediately at the bottom. I know a little bit about that. Before I came on staff, I was an elder. You looked at Fellowship's org chart, and the top box was the elder board. And then I came on staff and started as... a resident. I literally went from the top of the chart to the bottom. I was so low they had to print a second page just to show how I was. That's the move Jesus made.

That's what Jesus did. The Master became the servant. He took off the robes of royalty and put on the rags of servitude. And what does a servant do? Tends to the needs of others. And you don't have to spend much time in the Gospels to see that his ministry was full of that. He was the healer of the sick, an agent of mercy to the guilt-laden, a comforter to the grieving, a counselor to the troubled, a teacher to the confused, the washer of feet and, ultimately, a Savior to us all. He could have demanded that he be served. It was his right. But our Lord came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life for ours.

Jesus emptied himself through his obedience. Listen, you may hear that to mean he was a rule follower, and he was, but what I really want you to see him as is a relationship "honor"er. Jesus loved the Father, and he was eager to do what was asked of him. If any of you are parents, you get this. Sure, we want our kids to follow the rules because they are the rules. But we'd much rather them follow the rules because they think so highly of us, and value their relationship with us, that they are pleased to do what we ask. That was the relationship between Jesus and his Father. So, to honor that relationship, Jesus fulfilled God's Law and followed his Father's plan perfectly. And even when he knew his arrest and suffering were imminent, he came to the Father, asked that it be taken from him, but reiterated his commitment to what the Father would have him do, even if it came at a great cost.

And we know that it did. Jesus emptied himself by willingly laying down his life for the sins of the world. The reason there is Resurrection Sunday is because there was first Good Friday. His last act of obedience was to give his life, and to do so in a horrific and humiliating way usually reserved for a common criminal. It was on a cross that his body was emptied of life.

That was the life of Jesus. That was how he emptied himself. But here's the good news of Easter. The story doesn't end at the cross. It ends at an empty tomb. That's because **Jesus lived a life worthy of life!** The Bible says the wages of sin is death. Everyone who ever lived deserves death, all fall short. But not Jesus. The life he poured out was sinless, and the three days between the cross and the grave was a three-day battle with death, and Jesus won!

[Acts 2:24] ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

The tomb was empty because Jesus didn't belong there. What looked like defeat at the cross was turned into victory at the grave. The good news of the empty tomb means Jesus is alive. He is risen! And you know who else it's good news for? You and me.

The empty tomb means we can have life.

Jesus died on the cross as payment for *our* sins. He did not deserve to die. But in obedience he went to the cross on our behalf and was buried in a tomb. The victory isn't complete, though, if Jesus stayed in the grave. If the tomb wasn't empty, we are hopeless. That means death is final, death still wins. Rather than being left with an empty tomb, we're left empty-handed; no power, no recourse, no salvation. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, the Gospel isn't true. That makes me a liar and it makes the ministry of this church meaningless. That means your faith is in vain. It's a lie. It's empty. That means we are still in our sins, and death is our sentence.

I remember a time I was given the tab at a restaurant, and when I opened up my wallet to pull out the appropriate cash, I realized I was a little short. I didn't have enough to cover what was due, and I was stuck. You and I have a bill to be paid for our eternal souls, and none of us has enough spiritual currency to settle the debt on our own. But thanks be to God, Jesus is not still in the grave. He is risen! And if he's alive, we can be too. Paul says it this way:

[ROMANS 8:11] ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Jesus lived the life we couldn't live, and died the death we all deserved, so that we could share in the new life given to him. His resurrection was the final act of defeating sin and death. If you have the Spirit of God in you, you have the same Spirit that emptied Jesus' tomb. It means death cannot contain you. You cannot be held by it. You are free of it.

But don't miss this! The empty tomb is about more than the avoidance of death, it's an invitation to a full life! Jesus gave a promise to his followers. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the fullest." The empty tomb is the gateway to that life. All of us walked in here this morning running empty on something that only Jesus can provide. What is it for you? He rose from the dead to make our lives full – full of joy, full of hope, full of peace, full of purpose, and if you have trusted in him for your salvation, he is eager to fill you up in that way.

If you are here this morning and are not a follower of Christ, I'm thrilled that you came. You may be here searching. Maybe you've wrestled with the idea that there is no such thing as truth, or maybe you've come up empty in your search for truth. And, today, you showed up looking for answers to the question of who Jesus is. The empty tomb is your answer. Jesus is who he said he is. He is God. He lived a life worthy of God. He died in our place and he rose again three days later. He has power over sin and death. And the life he lives is the life you can live, forever.

Others of you have been living life to the fullest. You've accumulated a bunch of stuff, you've had great success in your career, you've had a number of relationships, you've indulged in a lot of ways, thinking that's what will fill you. Or you are using that to cover up for a feeling of guilt or insignificance you walked in here with. But you're still left feeling empty, and you came today in the hopes of finding something different.

Can I encourage you this morning by telling you you're not alone? There are many here today who have experienced that emptiness at some point. But many of those same people have also recognized that that emptiness is so massive, nothing in this world will do. The size of that emptiness can only be filled by the infinite God of the universe. The God who loves you so much that he died for you, he emptied himself for you. He is the God whose love is unconditional, who knows you by your name, who has a purpose for your life, who wants to be with you eternally, who has made forgiveness possible, who wants to be at peace with you, and who wants to save you. None of that other stuff will fill you. Only Jesus can make you full.

[ROMANS 10:9] 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.

There are no performance standards to attain. Jesus accomplished all that was required through the emptying of his life. Salvation is a free gift to be accepted. To receive the new life he offers, you must simply confess your belief that Jesus is God and was raised from the dead. What a wonderful day to start your new life in Christ. You can make that confession where you sit, with someone in our prayer rooms, or you can talk to one of our leaders in the Hub. We would love for you to join the family of God and become a part of our family at Fellowship.

For those of us who have confessed Jesus as Lord, what do we do with this? How are we to live in light of the empty tomb?

If you want to be full, you've got to get empty.

There are far too many Christians who have been given new life by God, but miss out on the full life offered by Jesus. The joy of Easter, the power of the empty tomb, the power of the resurrection, is that we have been set free to live our new life in a new way. Jesus showed us that empty is the only way to full.

[2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15] ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

The only proper response to the God who emptied himself for us is to empty ourselves for him. The love that saved us is also the love that now compels us. And if we are to empty ourselves for him, we need to empty ourselves like him. Five words that show the counterintuitive nature of the Gospel. Let Go. Serve. Obey. Die. They are the pathway to empty, and the pathway to a full life.

Let Go: Jesus let go of the divine trappings heaven. While we don't currently have access to the trappings of heaven, we do have access to the trappings and privileges of this world. We are tempted to hold onto our stuff, to hold onto our rights, to hold on to our habits (remember series called Life Drifts). Whatever we use, apart from Jesus, to make us full, will ultimately leave us feeling empty. All of those things compete with God for our affections. The more we can empty ourselves of the trappings of this life, the more we can be filled with Jesus.

Serve: Jesus was a servant. We are called to empty ourselves of any concern for position, status, and power. Our lives are to be lived for the benefit and blessing of others. Do you know that Jesus made you to be a demonstration of his love for someone else? The only way we can accomplish that is by having the heart of a servant.

Obey: Jesus was obedient, and our lives should be characterized by a relentless pursuit of obedience, not because we're a bunch of rule followers, but because we love our Savior! It would be easy for us to have just come from Good Friday, to know that all our sins are paid for on the cross, and to become casual about sin. But that's cheap grace. We don't want to live by cheap grace, because it dishonors the costly sacrifice God made for us. Sin is a barrier to God working through us. And while disobedience will never cause us to lose our salvation, it can cause us to lose our impact, the impact our lives can have for God. Obedience keeps us aligned with God and allows him to use us for the sake of the Gospel.

Die: Jesus died on the cross. While we're not asked to die for the sins of the world, Jesus said that if we want to be his followers, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. If we really want to live, we first must die. The more we die to self, the more we can live for Christ. Denying ourselves means emptying ourselves of our own self-centered agenda. Picking up our cross means committing ourselves to God's agenda, and giving our entire life to him to do with as he pleases. That's how we empty ourselves like Jesus emptied himself, and that's the way to a full life.

It has been said that "ministry that costs nothing is worth nothing." Well, the ministry of Jesus cost no less than his own life, but it was worth the salvation of creation. **Jesus gave up all he had, to give out all he could, to give us all we need.** The result was an empty tomb, a risen Savior, and eternal life for all who believe. Because Jesus was empty, we are full.