

Sun., April 14: Easter Sunday, 10 a.m. Worship

Message: Thresholds #9: Escape Tomb

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Memory Verse: [From Echo] -Andrew

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character.” -2 Timothy 3:16

Blurb: Thresholds in the Bible climax at Jesus’ tomb. On Friday, our worship service will mark the solemn death and burial of Jesus. He is laid in a tomb, and the entrance is sealed with a large stone. This shows us the weighty reality of sin and death; this is what we face! But then, on Easter, that tomb entrance is broken open, and the entrance becomes an exit. Jesus worked the first “escape tomb” miracle! And ever since then, He comes to us to lead us out of the tomb, the grave, in which we are trapped. Because of Jesus, we can escape death! Come Friday to see the tomb sealed. Then pray during the prayer vigil. Then come out at 6 a.m. for the sunrise worship at Lakeside Park. Back at church from 8-10am we have both breakfast and the Escape Tomb experience, followed by Easter Worship at 10am. Don’t miss this dramatic escape tomb experience!

Call to Worship: *O the Wonderful Cross* -Andrew

Begin with dim lighting

Greeting: -Pastor David

[Somber, Easter morning, before resurrection.]

Greetings.

We gather outside the tomb of Jesus. We saw Him buried here on Friday. Our hopes were dashed. We thought He was our promised King. But what kind of King could this be?

Special Music: *Lower Still* (Part 1) -April Bonsell

With slide show during the song

Reading 1: -Shane Tsubaki, Lee Dugdale

Background music continues.

Shane and Lee read dialogue (understanding what kind of King Jesus is)

Video: *While reading, time lapse video of a seed sprouting plays while they are reading their lines.*

Special Music: *Lower Still* (Part 2) -April Bonsell

Music “ramps up” in excitement.

As April begins singing about Jesus’ resurrection,

Tomb door falls (Tony L.), light from inside, house lights up

***Song:** *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*

Andrew invites congregation to stand

Andrew invites kids to come forward (Sue LaVigne will organize kids)

During the hymn, kids hold up Alleluia cards or wave streamers

***Reading 2:** “We Too” - Confirmation students

Reader 1 (Jacqueline): Truly Jesus is the Son of God!

Reader 2 (Aimire): By His death and resurrection, we too are made into God's children.

Reader 1: Truly Jesus is the Savior!

Reader 2: By His death and resurrection, we too can be saved.

Reader 1: Truly Jesus is victorious!

Reader 2: By His death and resurrection, we too can have victory over death.

Reader 1: Truly Jesus has been glorified.

Reader 2: By his death and resurrection, we too can share in his glory.

Reader 1: Truly Jesus is alive!

Reader 2: By his death and resurrection, we too can experience God's eternal life!

***Song:** *Resurrecting*

Andrew invites people to come up during the song and put flowers on the “living cross.”

Living Cross: Lynn Ruter will coordinate.

Welcome: -David

Invites congregation to be seated.

Easter Greeting: We’re going to use the ancient Easter Greeting, spoken by Christians on Easter morning since the Early Church. I say “Christ is risen!” and you respond, “He is risen indeed!” We do this three times. Okay, ready?

L: Christ is risen! P: **He is risen indeed!** (3X)

Introductions

Welcome

Forest Hills: Love, Grow. Serve.

And we proclaim that Jesus is not dead but alive...and that changes everything!

Visitors: Greeter’s table, and bags for kids.

We proclaim the testimony of Easter, recorded and passed down through the ages, of what is true. It is true the Jesus rose! We know because we experience the risen Jesus in our lives. We know because Scripture tells us. Our memory verse this week reminds us that we can trust the validity of Scripture.

Memory Verse:

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character.” -2 Timothy 3:16

Serve Moment: Easter Offering: Feed My Starving Children - David

Goal: \$1,500. Use special envelopes.

David introduces April, Andrew’s sister, and got married last year!

Offering: *My Redeemer Lives* -April Bonsell

Prayers & Lord’s Prayer: -Andrew

Message Bumper

Message: Thresholds #9: Escape Tomb

PP#1: Thresholds: The Story of the Bible, the Story of Salvation

Escape Tomb

“If the Son sets you free, you really will be free.” -John 8:36

Thresholds: The Story of the Bible, the Story of Salvation. Escape Tomb. John 8:36, “If the Son sets you free, you really will be free.”

PP#2: *Image of us as a family at the Escape Room.*

For Christmas with my wife’s family, we all went to an escape room experience. If you’ve never been to one, they are places that are set up based on themes, like international spy, rich mansion, haunted house, pirates, and so forth. The basic idea is that you are locked in a room and you must use clues you find around the room to unlock your way out. If you don’t do it in time, well, you’re told that either you’ve been killed, were captured, or you’re stuck in there forever.

Who here this morning tried our Easter Escape Tomb experience here at church? Was it fun? Then, you get the idea. If anyone wants to still try the Escape Room, we’ll have three rooms ready after worship. Just meet by the education wing door. It’ll take about 20 minutes...maybe!

When we went at Christmas, there were nine of us. We thought we were pretty smart, but the host said that most groups can’t figure out the puzzle in time. We’re doomed, then, I thought. It takes us a half an hour to choose a restaurant, let alone work together to solve a multiple-layered puzzle!

But the host told us not to worry, for they will send along a guide with our group. That guide knows how to get out: all the puzzles, all the solutions, and can give us help along the way.

So, the pastor in me just had to review: We’re trapped in a room and we can’t get out. The puzzle is too hard, and we are doomed to die. But with us is someone who’s gotten out of this locked room before, and is willing to help us if we want it. Man, that’ll preach! Happy Easter!

PP#3: *Image of a spy escape room, like the vault room, our third room.*

Well, we only had to ask for a few hints, and in plenty of time, we figured it out! We got the correct numbers to the combination—I must modestly say that I figured out that the book’s page number was the key number—and the door opened! We were so proud of ourselves. But what we soon discovered was that all that we had done was open the door to another locked room. We were only partially done!

It got more intense, everyone talking at once, screaming out random ideas, more clues from our guide, and we were able to open the vault door with 10 minutes to spare. As the door opened, we saw that we needed to solve *yet another* level of puzzles to get out of the vault. But it was too late. We were down to the last puzzle when time ran out. Our guide informed us that we were, to his estimate, about 3 minutes from being free. But it wasn’t good enough. We didn’t get out in time. We all died.

PP#4: *Picture of us at the Escape Room, but the word “DIED” superimposed across it.*

Looking back, part of our problem is that we didn’t utilize our guide enough. We wanted to try to do it all on our own. We worked and worked, but we just couldn’t get it on our own. Had we trusted in our guide just a little more, we would’ve made it.

PP#5: *Image for people trapped in a room*

The Bible's grand story tells of a universal locked room that all of humanity is trapped in. God created us for abundant and eternal life. The Garden of Eden was a time when people lived without any problems, any troubles, without death. But ever since Adam and Eve, we've been trapped in an escape-proof room. Adam and Eve were the first, but all of us since then have turned our backs on God, chosen to do things our way, and put our trust in our own abilities. The reality, however, is that when we chose our own path, we walked right into a locked room! That's the thing that's always true about trusting in ourselves, we think we know where we're going, but only when it's too late do we find out it's a [pun!] *dead* end.

PP#6: *Slide showing the various thresholds of our story*

The grand story of the Bible is about God coming after us, after we walked away from Him. That's the story of salvation! And what's intriguing is that all along the way throughout the Bible, as the individual stories are told, we've been finding thresholds. At the Garden of Eden, cherubim with flaming swords block the way back to Eden. Cain hears sin knocking at the door. God shuts the ark's door protecting Noah and family. The Passover Lamb's blood is spread on the doorposts, the Ark of the Covenant is kept separate behind a veil curtain. Each of these stories tells of God coming to rescue people, and together they tell the story of ultimate salvation that God has planned to rescue humanity from its self-made trap.

All these thresholds point to, and culminate in Jesus as the Savior, the One who will pay for human sin, reconcile people back to God, and open up the threshold to life. Jesus points to the narrow gate, that leads to the narrow path of discipleship. Jesus knocks at the heart's door. Jesus is the gate, who lays down His life for the sheep.

This past week, we followed Jesus through the gates into Jerusalem, where He was arrested, falsely tried, condemned, and crucified. Jesus, our Savior, died! He gave Himself as the total sacrifice for all human sin. He earned our forgiveness by suffering our punishment. We are forgiven, and now our relationship with God can be restored!

PP#7: *Image of the sealed tomb and Roman soldiers from Good Friday*

But then, then, they laid Jesus' body in a tomb. And as amazing as it is that He was our atoning sacrifice, *that* threshold, into His tomb, holds captive all the other thresholds of God's salvation we've seen. Jesus' tomb is a one-way threshold, and His sealed grave shows us that our graves have the same one-way threshold: only going in. No matter what happens in life, whatever we experience, we all go through that one-way threshold into our death. It's a locked room we can't get out of! Jesus' sealed tomb shows us that death claims victory: over Jesus, and over us!

And this is how Easter begins, in the dark, in sadness, locked in a room with no way out. Turn to John 20. We so need to go hear this story. All Scripture is true, and useful. This is the threshold story that changes absolutely everything! This is reason why we have joy. But it starts where we are: in the dark, in defeat.

PP#8: John 20:1-18 (CEB)

1 Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put Him."

John 20, verse 1, “Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. [Notice now what she thinks happened.] She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved [that’s John, Jesus’ best friend], and said, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put Him.” She thinks the Jewish authorities have stolen the body just to spite His followers!

PP#9: John 20:1-18 (CEB)

3 Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. 4 They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. 5 Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn’t go in. 6 Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus’ head. It wasn’t with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. 8 Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 They didn’t yet understand the scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

Verse 3, “Peter and the other disciple [in response to Mary’s report] left to go to the tomb. They were running together, but the other disciple [who was younger!] ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn’t go in. Following him, Simon Peter [of course, goes straight in!] entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus’ head. It wasn’t with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. [The report about the grave cloths is important because it indicates that the body wasn’t stolen, for the cloths would have been taken with the body, and the fact that they are neatly folded suggests that someone peacefully and calmly tended to them.] Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. [It seems that he believed Mary, or perhaps that Jesus had ascended to the Father. Either way, to him Jesus is still physically dead. Verse 9,] They didn’t yet understand the scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.”

We can’t stop here. Is Jesus dead or alive?

PP#10: John 20:1-18 (CEB)

11 Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. 12 She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. 13 The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put Him.” 14 As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was Jesus.

It seems Mary came back with them to the tomb, but when they leave, she stays there, weeping. Verse 11, “Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, seated [see, peaceful and calm] where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ [Do me a favor and remember this question that the angels ask her.]

“She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put Him.” As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was Jesus.” Somehow, it seems, His appearance had changed. She was weeping, too, I suppose.

PP#11: John 20:1-18 (CEB)

15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?”

Thinking He was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will get Him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means Teacher).

Verse 15, “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? [Same question the angels ask her!] Whom are you looking for?’

“Thinking He was the gardener, she replied, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will get Him.’ [She wanted to finish anointing His body.]

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

“She turned [and this time, when she saw Him, she recognized Him!] and said to Him in Aramaic, ‘Rabbouni’ (which means Teacher).”

This is the first human experience of Easter! Her mind is blown! Pkooh! Mary Magdalene is the first person to witness Jesus alive. Why? I don’t know. But I can tell you a bit of trivia: for centuries after Jesus, the Roman and secular authorities in that patriarchal culture ridiculed Christians that their first eye-witness was a woman! “Christians rely on the testimony of a woman!” they mocked. I think perhaps, in choosing Mary, I sense a little feminism in Jesus!

PP#12: John 20:1-18 (CEB)

17 Jesus said to her, “Don’t hold on to me, for I haven’t yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I’ve seen the Lord.” Then she told them what He said to her.

Anyway, Mary was the first to see the risen Jesus. And He appears to her even before He goes to the Father, where, it seems, He gets His physical body perfected. Verse 17, “Jesus said to her, ‘Don’t hold on to me, for I haven’t yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

“Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, ‘I’ve seen the Lord.’ Then she told them what He said to her.”

PP#13: *Image of the tomb’s stone being opened with light.*

Jesus had come out of the tomb! He was alive! Somehow, some way, He came out of that [pun] death trap!

This is why Easter is the greatest miracle of all time. Death is the strongest power on earth, and the power that holds us down. It won on Good Friday. It was victorious. But on Easter, Jesus [pun] comes back, and defeats *it*!

And Mary isn’t the only one who saw the risen Jesus. He appeared to the apostles, numerous times, and He appeared to others, hundreds of others. Over 500 people saw Him (1 Cor. 15:16).

But it doesn’t stop there. Physically He ascended back to glory, but because He is alive, He continues to appear spiritually to everyone! Remember that threshold, Jesus knocking on the heart’s door? He continues to do that. He comes to each of us and offers us the same victory over death that

He earned on Easter. You and I, if we put our trust in Jesus, He will forgive us our sins, turn us to God, restore our relationship with the Father, give us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, give us life abundant, and He will free us from our graves and take us to live with Him forever! He can do all of this because of Easter, because He is not dead: He is alive! Hallelujah!

He did the impossible! He made that threshold of the grave a two-way street! Yes we die physically, and our bodies are buried...but our souls, who we really are, we get to go with Jesus. And like Jesus, we will be given a perfect body, one that will last forever.

PP#14: *Image of hugging Jesus in paradise/heaven.*

Jesus opens the tomb, and He opens the threshold to the Garden of Eden. He opens the path to the Tree of Life again! One day, when He's finished, we'll be back in paradise. Heaven will be here on earth, it will be the Garden of Eden for all who accept Jesus' invitation. We will walk and talk with God in the cool of the day. And there will be no more troubles, no more trials, no more sorrow, no more sin, no more death! And this will never end! *That* threshold will become a one-way street! Once we go in to glory, there will be no more being kicked out. Never again. Jesus has fixed that problem! Hallujah!

If you have not put your trust in Jesus, today is the best day to do it! You are stuck in a locked room. No matter how hard you try, you cannot get out. Your grave is a one-way threshold. But you need to know that because of Easter, there is one person, and only one!, who has broken out of the grave. He knows the way! And He is has come to you, right where you are, and He offers to give you what you need to release that lock!

PP#15: *Image of plastic Easter eggs*

I'm going to ask the ushers to pass around baskets with plastic Easter eggs in them. By now some of you may know this is my Easter tradition. I want you each to get one. And once again, I ask you not to open your eggs yet. Resist the temptation! I want it to be a surprise.

You see, Easter is not just for when we die. Easter is for right now, too. Even when we choose to become Jesus' disciple, we struggle to stay on the right path. We get ourselves into messes. We listen to the wrong voices. We slip into selfishness. We get ourselves trapped. Perhaps it's a marriage that has turned lifeless. Perhaps a relationship with a child or family member has become distant. Perhaps your career path feels meaningless. Perhaps your finances are out of control. Perhaps you've been given a scary diagnosis. Perhaps you've experienced a death in your life recently. Perhaps an addiction has engulfed your life. Perhaps you're struggling just to keep afloat, to keep all the plates spinning, and some of them have even crashed on the ground. Perhaps you have a hard time pushing yourself out of bed in the morning.

I want you to know that Easter is real! Jesus is alive! And He has come to be with you! As you struggle in your locked room, whatever that may be, you need to know that you cannot handle it on your own. But you are not alone! There is someone in there with you. And He has escaped that very room—yours, the one you feel stuck in—and He knows the answers for how to get out. You have a guide. He can help you. He *wants* to help you...that's why He's there! All you need to do is ask for help.

Remember at Christmas how I didn't ask our guide for enough help? We were stubborn and wanted to try to do it on our own. What happened to us? We died!

It doesn't have to be that way for you, in your life! There is hope. There is help. Jesus is alive!

PP#16: *Image of a person somehow chained/stuck, with a comb lock similar to the handout lock*

Okay, go ahead and open up your eggs. Do you see what's inside? It's a combination lock. This lock is like your locked room. It's closed. You can't get it open.

I want you to think about the ways that you feel stuck in a locked room, trapped in a mess too big for you. Is it a relationship? A wrong self-identity? A diagnosis? What has you trapped? What has you locked down? I want this little lock to be a reminder to you of what holds you captive.

You can't get it open, but there is a combination. And Jesus, resurrected on Easter, holds the answers. So, in order to open the lock, you have to turn to the Easter story that we read today. There are clues in this passage about Jesus' resurrection that will open your lock, just like it is the story of this passage of Jesus' resurrection that will unlock whatever has you trapped in life.

PP#17: *Image of a person with Jesus superimposed over him...showing Jesus spiritually present*

Do you remember the question the angels asked Mary? "Why are you crying?" Jesus asked the same question. You see, she thought death had still won. But in truth, it's power was broken. She had no reason to weep, Jesus was alive!

That question is for us, today, too. Why do we weep? Why do we feel stuck? Why do we think there is no hope? Easter is real, and it is true. It is true that Jesus rose again, and broke open the tomb. It is true that He holds the key to your grave, too!

And, He has come to you, right where you are, in the locked room you are stuck in right now, and He is there, wanting to help you. All you have to do is ask for help, and He will get you out! "If the Son sets you free, you really will be free" (John 8:36).

Jesus is alive!

Christ has risen! [He has risen indeed!]

Hallelujah!

Closing Song: *Day of Resurrection -Sanctify*

Memory Verse:

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character." -2 Timothy 3:16

Announcements: -David

Wed.

Rummage Sale

FMSC

Benediction: -David