

Goal: That the hearers rejoice in the most important message they can ever hear.

Mouse Trap Cheese commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcSBO8YAnTQ>

I'm guessing, that's not what you were expecting. I wasn't the first time I saw it. It's like, April Fool's, the mouse isn't dead, he's alive. But for Christians, today isn't about April Fool's. It's not about Nolan's Cheddar Cheese. It about Jesus, rising from the dead. It's about a message that no one was expecting. (***"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large."*** (Mark 16: 1 – 4)

Those women went to the tomb that morning expecting to find a dead body. They watched Him die. They saw him buried. They knew He was dead and gone. No question about it. But after the Sabbath, when they went to the tomb early in the morning, the stone had been rolled away. This wasn't what they expected. They were confused. They were scared. They certainly didn't expect Him to be alive. But He was. And Jesus appeared to His followers; to the women, to the Emmaus disciples, to the 10, then to Thomas, to James and Paul tells us, then to 500 others. They all saw Jesus alive. He was dead, but He is alive. This wasn't what anyone expected.

My son said to me this last week, *"Easter is on April Fool's. That must be why everyone was so surprised. It's like God's April Fool's."* Rachel corrected him, *"Didn't Jesus tell his disciples that He was going to be betrayed, killed, and then rise from the dead?"* I added, *"The Old Testament is full of verses where God says what will happen to Jesus. God wasn't trying to trick them. He was saving them. Just not what they expected."*

There's a story of President Obama visiting a nursing home. He stopped and chatted with one of the residents who was sitting in her wheelchair. After talking to her a few seconds, he noticed she had a blank expression on her face, so he said, *"Do you know who I am?"* She looked at him for a few seconds and said, *"No, honey, I don't. But if you go to the nurse's station I'm sure they can help you figure out who you are."*

For many, today just doesn't make sense because they don't know who Jesus is. They don't understand why we make such a big deal about Easter, or Good Friday, or Maundy Thursday. For them, it's all about candy or the bunny or family time. Oh, they may have heard of Jesus, but they don't know the real story and they don't understand the

significance it has for them. They don't get that God Himself came down here to solve the problem created by our sin. He came down to willingly to keep the law in our place, take the punishment we deserve, and die the death our sins demand. That's what we remembered Good Friday, His death in our place. And while many may have heard about that, they don't understand that He did it for them. And what's even more confusing is what today celebrates. When Christ rose on the third day, it was a victory for us. When you know who Jesus is, when you believe in Him, when you have a faith relationship with Him, you get the benefit of everything He did.

One of the big reasons some people don't and won't believe is because of the ongoing suffering in this world. And there's a lot of it, all around us. School shootings, police shootings, homelessness, people fighting, protesting, demanding justice. This last week I learned that a very dear friend of mine has stage 4 prostate cancer. The prognosis isn't good. *"It's not fair."* You don't want to see your friends suffer. But it reminds me who the true enemy is: Death. The deserved consequence of sin is the enemy, the veil, that covers all people. And that's precisely why Jesus came, to conquer death for us. ***("He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken." (Isaiah 25: 7 – 8)***

To do that, He endured suffering. He lived in a hot, dry desert long before air conditioning. And He knew pain. He watched His friends and loved ones get sick and die. Although, He never did anything wrong, and was rejected by His own people. Then He took upon Himself all the evil of the world, all of man's corruption, every single sin of all people and carried it obediently to the cross.

We talk about the cross so often, but don't miss the brutality of that instrument of agonizing execution. Was it a hot day? Were there flies circling Him that He was unable to swat away? Imagine the pain of the nails driven through His innocent hands and feet. Imagine Him hanging there, pushing against those open wounds just to take each breath. This was the greatest injustice the world has ever seen. Yet, God used it to accomplish your good, your forgiveness, your salvation. That's why Good Friday is really good. Today, we celebrate the affirmation of that good. It wasn't what anyone was expecting, but it was all God's divine plan. God raised Jesus from the dead so that we would know that His death was the full and complete payment for the sins of everyone. When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, you have forgiveness, you have eternal life.

Back to the mousetrap commercial. When I first saw it, I thought the mouse was dead, but the unexpected happened. Nolan's cheddar cheese gave him strength to overcome the trap. That's where the analogy breaks down because we are not strong enough to defeat death on our own. We're caught in the trap of our own sins and we have no way out. Death seems inevitable. It's the reality of life in this world. But you and I know what today is all about. Jesus defeated death for us.

When Jesus died, He killed death. And when Jesus rose, the power of death was beat. Yes, we still die physically, and it hurts us. It scares us, and it causes pain to those we leave behind. But because of what Jesus did, because we have faith in Him, we know that death is no longer the end! Death has been swallowed up in victory! So, we are able to proclaim with the prophet, (***"It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."***) (*Isaiah 25: 9*)

Many people just can't believe this. Maybe, some of you are struggling with this truth. It's so contrary to what we'd expect. So, what makes the difference? What makes today a day of rejoicing instead of uncertainty? God's Word makes all the difference. God's Word, spoken by the angel: (***"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "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. 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."***) (*Mark 16: 5 – 7*)

They remembered what Jesus said. They trusted His Word, and that makes all the difference. Only God's Word can make a difference. You know about that Word. You've heard it spoken this morning, "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" "*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*" You've read it on the screen, as it has been passed down to us and preserved through God's messengers. (***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."***) (*1 Corinthians 15: 3 – 5*) But most of all, and best of all, you have the Word made flesh, who lived and suffered and died and rose again for you. You have God's Word on the matter.

Jesus said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*** (*John 11: 25 – 26*) Jesus has conquered death. He did it for you. It wasn't what anyone expected, but it was God's plan all along. Praise God who gives us the victory. "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" "*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*" Amen.