

From Rubble to Resurrection

Easter, 2014

A Sermon by Don Cummings
Grace Church • Buena Vista, Colorado

Scripture: John 20:1-18

RUBBLE

The Disciples

Their world had been absolutely shattered. **They** had allowed themselves to dream too big, and now it had turned into a nightmare. **They** had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and they had give him their all. **Only** hours ago Peter had proclaimed, “**I will** follow you to the death!”

But now, Peter was not to be found. **Nor**, for that matter, were any of the other disciples. **When** Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane they all fled into hiding (except for John), afraid for their own lives. **Peter**, at least, had followed Jesus to the high priest’s house, but it was there that he denied even knowing Jesus—three times, just as Jesus had said he would. **When** Peter heard the rooster crow, he too vanished, the delusion of his bravado and courage completely destroyed.

It is astonishing how quickly life can be reduced to a pile of rubble. **A single** moment in time can cause life to come tumbling down all around us.

Tanisha

Her life had been one hardship after another. **Her** parents had divorced when she was in junior high school. **She** wasn’t able to go to college, even though she was a bright girl. **Her** mother couldn’t afford to send her. **She** had taken a dead end job in the small town where she lived. **Then** she met a fellow she really liked. **He** was right for her. **They** got married and had two children. **Then** one day she was driving home and got hit broadside by a driver who wasn’t paying attention. **She** was seriously injured. **One** of the babies was killed. **The** other was in intensive care when I first saw her. **She** was only two years old at the time. **I leaned** over her crib and whispered in her ear, “**Tanisha**, I’m a friend of God’s and I’ve come to tell you God loves you.”

A Failed Marriage

He sat in my office with his head in his hands. “**Things** aren’t going well at home,” he said. “**My** wife and I just aren’t getting along. **I’m** not sure I even love her anymore. **We’ve** tried to make a go of it, but it just isn’t working. **I’m** ready to throw

in the towel. I just don't how tell her." I asked him if they had tried counseling. "Yes, we've been going to someone for two years. It hasn't helped. I think it's over."

Unfulfilled Career Dream

She and her family were so proud when she graduated from college. Her whole life was ahead of her. Her prospects were bright. But two years later, she still had not been able to land a job in the field for which she had trained. She had settled for a lot less than she had hoped for. She was still in an entry-level job and she didn't know how she would ever get beyond where she was. She hardly believed in herself anymore. What had happened? Had she been chasing an impossible dream?

Suddenly Unemployed

It was pretty tough for him to come home that night and tell his wife and kids that he had been let go from his job. The company had been bought out. The new conglomerate was downsizing. They didn't need him anymore. "Can you imagine it," he said, "fifteen years right down the tubes. I can't believe it. Loyalty doesn't count for anything anymore. I was even one of their top producers. What am I going to do now?"

Unwanted Pregnancy

She was just a kid. She was in the youth group in a church I served a long time ago. She called saying she needed to talk. When I met her at the office she spilled her awful secret. "I'm pregnant, and I'm afraid to tell my dad." I didn't blame her. Her mother had left a long time ago. Her dad was a pretty hard, unforgiving guy. She was afraid of what he would do to her when he found out. "Would you go with me when I tell him?" she asked. I was there when she broke the news. The only thing I knew to say to him was that she was his daughter, and there was never a time she needed him more than right now. Now was his chance to show her what kind of a father he wanted to be for her.

Rubble. It comes in all shapes and sizes. It's got your name on it. It's got my name on it. None of us are immune. The secret is not how to escape it, but how to overcome it.

FROM RUBBLE TO RESURRECTION

Over the past few decades, America has been wracked by a number of terrible events that have shaken us to our foundations. September 11 was the worst one of them, but there have been many others. I think back to several years ago when the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed. We watched this tragic drama unfold as scores of people were extracted from that terrible rubble. Sometime after the Oklahoma tragedy there came news from

Jonesboro, Arkansas about the 13 and 11-year-old gunmen who took five lives in a senseless act.

Two whole communities were reduced to rubble in a matter of seconds. **But** out of these two dark tragedies there shone a light of hope. **Both** news anchors, and reporters in the field, commented on how these communities came together in the face of these tragedies. **For** those who could see behind the headlines, it was obvious that these communities responded the way they did because they were directed by a profound faith that enabled them to see beyond rubble to resurrection. **No** amount of rubble was able to extinguish their resurrection faith.

RESURRECTION

And isn't this what Easter is all about? **We** have prettified Easter with bright **colors** and **bunnies** and **candy** and new **clothes** and spring **festivals**. **But** Easter does not take its meaning from any of these things. **It** takes its meaning from the brutal fact that when the world had done its worst to the Son of God, God had the last word. **And** that word is Resurrection, new life. **Life** overcoming death. **Goodness** overwhelming evil. **The** power of God overturning the powers of this world. **The** empty tomb of Easter is God's own promise that he has the power to take us from rubble to resurrection.

Rembrandt

The great artist, Rembrandt, is known for his unique style. **He** made the backgrounds in his paintings very dark in order to focus attention more sharply on the subject of his paintings. **And** so you have a knight in dark armor against a darker background, but his face is illumined brightly by the light Rembrandt casts upon it. **Our** eyes are drawn past the darkness to the light so there can be no mistake about what the artist wanted us to see.

Resurrection Overcomes Rubble

The resurrection is the jewel that God places in the dark setting of our rubble-filled lives so there can be no mistake about his clear message to us. **Jesus** is the one who delivered that message: "**In** this world you will have trouble, but take courage, for I have overcome the world." **The** resurrection is God's way of saying to you and to me that Jesus was right. **He** has overcome the world, and in him we can overcome it too. **And** here is where our joy in life is found: not in the absence of trouble, but in the power that God gives us to overcome trouble; **and** not in the easy life, but in the power that God gives us to live the abundant life.

Many of you here this morning know what rubble is all about. **Life** has thrown you some nasty curves. **You** have struggled to keep your head above water. **Anxiety** and fear, depression and despair have been your all too frequent companions. **It** is to you that Jesus says, "**Take** courage, I have overcome the world."

It is to you that God says, “This is my son. Believe in him, and you shall have abundant life in this world and life eternal in the world to come.”

A Brazen Attempt by Rubble to Overcome Resurrection

In Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is built over the place where Jesus was crucified and over the place where he was buried. In the 2nd century, when the Roman Empire was trying to stamp out the infant Christian movement, the Roman Emperor Hadrian came to the holy city and almost completely obliterated the Place of the Skull where Jesus was crucified, and the Garden Tomb where Jesus was buried and rose again. Hadrian reduced that sacred spot to rubble, then filled it in with fill dirt and built over the site a temple to the goddess Aphrodite. With that, he believed he had erased it, and Christianity, from history.

Resurrection Wins Out! (Constantine and Helena)

Two-hundred years later, another Emperor of Rome became a Christian. His name was Constantine and his mother, Helena, also became a Christian. Helena made her own pilgrimage to the holy land to discover what she could about the places where Jesus had been born, lived, died, and rose again. Commissioned by Constantine, she built a church in Bethlehem over the cave where early tradition said Jesus was born. When she came to Jerusalem she asked the local people where Jesus had been crucified and buried. In one of the greatest ironies of history, I can just imagine what they said, “Why right over there. The Temple of Aphrodite marks spot.” The very thing Emperor Hadrian had sought to destroy, he had actually preserved. Helena had the temple torn down, and Golgotha and the place of the tomb excavated, and built a church over the spot to preserve and protect it for generations of pilgrims yet to come. And they are still coming, even 1600 years later.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher

Today, when you enter the door of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, there is a mosaic that orients you to what you will see. On the right up a flight of steep steps, there is the Chapel of the Cross marking the spot where Jesus was crucified. Directly ahead of you, is the stone of unction—a marble slab that marks the spot where the women prepared Jesus’ body for burial. On the left, in the main chamber of the church, there is an ornate aedicule—a shrine—over the place where Helena determined the tomb was located. The shrine is small and dark. Inside the inner chamber, there is a marble slab that is placed over where Jesus’ body was laid. Only a few people can enter this small space at a time. I’ve had the privilege of standing there with each member of my family. It is a holy place. And though I’ve been there three times, the last time was different.

I had entered the aedicule first, followed by Bonnie, our oldest daughter Sally, and our son Peter. At the very back of the chamber, right next to where I stood, there was a woman crouched on the floor with her head resting on the marble slab. She was dressed all in black with a heavy veil completely covering her face. She was

sobbing silently and praying fervently. **She** was a picture of abject grief and sorrow. **She** represented all the rubble you and I could ever know. **She** was undone. **My** heart went out to her, and everything within me wanted to reach across the barriers of culture, gender, and language to touch her and to say to her, "**Woman** why are you crying? **Who** are you looking for? **It's** all right. **He's** not here. **He** is risen. **And** he gives us courage in life, and victory over death. **He** can turn your rubble into resurrection. **Take** courage. **He's** not here. **He** is risen.

Preaching outline:

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The Disciples
Tanisha
A Failed Marriage
An Unfulfilled Career Dream
Suddenly Unemployed
An Unwanted Pregnancy
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FROM RUBBLE TO RESURRECTION

Albert P. Murrah Federal Building
Jonesboro, Arkansas
A profound faith
No amount of rubble could overcome their
resurrection faith

RESURRECTION

Isn't this what Easter is all about?
We've prettified Easter
But Easter takes its meaning from the brutal fact that
when the world had done its worst to the
Son of God, God had the last word:
Resurrection/new life

REMBRANDT

Dark backgrounds
Enlightened subjects
Draws our attention to what Rembrandt
wanted us to see

RESURRECTION OVERCOMES RUBBLE

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setting of our rubble filled lives so there can be no mistaking the
message God wants us
to know.
Jesus brings us the message: "In this world you will
have trouble, but take courage,
I have overcome the world."
Here is where our joy is found:
not in the absence of trouble,

but in the power God gives us
to overcome trouble;
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God gives us to live the abundant life.
Many of you know what rubble is about

A BRAZEN ATTEMPT BY RUBBLE TO OVERCOME RESURRECTION

Hadrian

RESURRECTION WINS OUT!

Constantine/Helena
Aedicule woman