

Study

An Lent sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton in the The Walk
Delivered on March 13, 2022
on the following text:

Luke 24:1-12 NRSV

It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week. The women took the spices they had prepared. Then they went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from it. 3 When they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 They were wondering about this. Suddenly two men in clothes as bright as lightning stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified. They bowed down with their faces to the ground. Then the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 Jesus is not here! He has risen! Remember how he told you he would rise. It was while he was still with you in Galilee. 7 He said, ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people. He must be nailed to a cross. On the third day he will rise from the dead.’” 8 Then the women remembered Jesus’ words. 9 They came back from the tomb. They told all these things to the 11 apostles and to all the others. 10 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them were the ones who told the apostles. 11 But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn’t make any sense to them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent over and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Then he went away, wondering what had happened.

Prayer of Illumination

Spirit of the Living God, come and fall afresh on us, your children, as we seek to grow deeper in our walk with you. Speak to us through the Scripture, my message and the witness of others so that we may order our lives as you intend. Amen.

Sermon



A little while ago, I read an interesting excerpt from The Washington Post¹ of a book written by Christian Davenport called “The Space Barons: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and the Quest to Colonize the Cosmos.” And when I read the excerpt it really had me thinking about Easter. Let me share with you part of the story about SpaceX’s significant test at success:

Davenport writes, “Within minutes of liftoff, it was clear the Dragon spacecraft was in trouble. Inside mission control on the morning of March 1, 2013, the SpaceX team was desperately trying to figure out what went wrong and soon pinpointed the problem: A few valves were stuck.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/with-a-spacecraft-in-trouble-and-the-white-house-watching-spacex-had-to-deliver/2018/03/15/553d89cc-2701-11e8-874b-d517e912f125_story.html

Lori Garver, NASA's deputy administrator, was beside herself. The Obama administration had placed a bold bet on SpaceX, awarding it hundreds of millions of dollars on contracts to fly crew — not just cargo — to the International Space Station, despite the critics who said it was foolish to trust a private outfit with such a complicated endeavor.

This was SpaceX's second official cargo delivery flight to the space station. It had to work, thought Garver, the NASA deputy administrator. They had to find a way to rescue the Dragon capsule, and fast. But as they tried to figure out what was wrong, Steve Davis, SpaceX's director of advanced projects, had begun to prepare for the worst — aborting the mission.



“Is the vehicle even functioning enough that you can bring it back?” he wondered. “We weren't sure. That was the only time we had ever planned for an emergency reentry, which is like a big thing because you have to whip it through airspace. You have to reroute planes in real time. It's not awesome. And so we were in panic mode.”

SpaceX had been in panic mode before. In late 2010, on the eve of the Falcon 9's second launch and the first test flight of the Dragon spacecraft, a last-minute inspection of the rocket revealed a crack in the nozzle, or skirt, of the second-stage engine.

“You're not going to fly with a crack,” Davis said. “We're like, ‘What do we do?’ ” The normal thing would be to take the rocket apart, replace the engine skirt, reinspect it. And then “you're up and launching in a month,” he said. No one wanted to lose that much time.



Musk had a wild idea: “What if we just cut the skirt? Like, literally cut around it?” That is, what if they trimmed off the bottom as if it were a fingernail?

“He went person by person and said, ‘Would this have any adverse effect on you?’ ” Davis recalled.

Davis said that because the skirt would be shorter, they would get less performance from the engine. “But we had so much margin built into it, it didn't matter,” he said. Everyone concurred, and “literally within 30 minutes, the decision was

made.”

The company flew a technician from California to Cape Canaveral; armed with a pair of shears, like the kind used to trim hedges, he cut around the crack.

“And we flew the next day successfully,” Davis said. “That could have been the dumbest thing we ever did, but it was amazing.”

Making the flash decision to cut the skirt was not how NASA would have handled the situation. But NASA officials agreed that there wasn’t any reason it wouldn’t work and they approved the launch, astounded by how quickly SpaceX was addressing the problem. That sort of go-for-it ethos had become a SpaceX trademark.

Now, as Dragon was in trouble with the stuck valves, SpaceX had to figure out, on the fly, how to make it work.

As the SpaceX team scrambled, Show Bill Gerstenmaier, NASA’s associate administrator for human exploration and operations, and Michael Suffredini, the space station’s program office manager, were in the room watching.

They were two of the agency’s most senior officials, with nearly 60 years at NASA between them. They had served through the Challenger and Columbia disasters, had seen all sorts of problems in space, and now, as NASA faced another potential crisis, they were talking softly between themselves.

Fearing the political fallout of a failed mission, Garver, the deputy NASA administrator, wanted them to take over, to swoop in and save SpaceX.

There were no better people to come fix this. But the two NASA elder statesmen just watched, offering a bit of advice, a whisper here, a suggestion there, to the SpaceX crew. Mostly, they stayed out of the way.

“They were like grandparents,” Garver recalled. “And it was almost like grandpa taking them fishing: ‘Try over there. There might be some fish over there.’” A soft touch designed to let the kids learn to fish on their own, rather than an impatient dad grabbing the pole and catching the fish for them.

As they watched, the people in the control room worked the problem. The valves were stuck, so they’d need something to make it unstuck. On a spacecraft circling the globe at 17,500 mph, that was no easy task. But the SpaceX team knew that if pressure could be built ahead of the valves and then suddenly released, it might just deliver the kick needed to jar them open.

One of the engineers typed up a command, right then, on the fly, programming the spacecraft to build up the pressure. Then, they tried to beam the new command up to the Dragon, as if it were an iPhone update. At that moment, the NASA elders knew they were witnessing something special. It wasn’t that they had fixed a problem with the spacecraft; that happened all the time. It was how fast they did it.

“The SpaceX mind-set had always been about adapting quickly, and it really shined that day,” Suffredini said. “They had really an in-depth understanding of that system and the software, and that’s one of the secrets of their success. They probably had the kid in there who wrote the original code.”

But the SpaceX crew was having a hard time communicating with the spacecraft. The code wouldn’t transmit. So someone got the Air Force on the phone, which gave the company access



to a more powerful satellite dish, which allowed, at last, the uplink. The code worked. The valves opened. The mission was a success.

Bear with me, I wonder if as Jesus was hanging on the cross God was reacting like NASA and SPACEX in mission control? With Jesus, God's own son coming to earth, God had decided upon a fundamental shift in how God was going to relate to God's own people. Before this shift, God had sent prophets and priests - men and women - who would try to help guide God's

people away from their sin and towards God for their salvation, but that wasn't working; God needed to try something new.

I mean it was a risky endeavor for God to come down in bone and flesh as Jesus the Son; but something had to be done to save God's people. But as it turns out God's people and most of the rest of the world had rejected Jesus and here Jesus was hanging on the cross about to die. God's new and risky plan for salvation was in trouble. The plan -and the man- was about to die. Was God in panic mode? I'm sure some would say "of course not; God knows everything" and yes, that is true. But it's also God's own Son that's about to die. As a parent, I get panicked when my children are in trouble.

At the same time God's previous attempts at salvation had also failed or only worked in part. The normal thing for God to do in these moments when the salvation plan was in trouble would be to send another prophet or priest. To ask another to sacrifice again, but this time it was different... what was God going to do with Jesus on the cross?

God acted differently in Jesus. Not in the careful, safe NASA way. God took a SPACEX-type risk and it meant Jesus would die. Yet In doing so, God was going to go down and defeat death itself. God was going to try something entirely new. This time God acts with resurrection. God raises Jesus from the dead.

Now this wasn't some kind of spiritual CPR. Jesus is raised to new life.. Jesus' resurrection opens the door to eternal life, where death and sin are no longer chains holding God's salvation plan back, but resurrection is what makes God's salvation mission of Jesus a success. And that mission of salvation is still succeeding today and as Christians we celebrate this ongoing success on Easter, not just once a year, but daily, in real life. For Death and sin have lost their power and new life is present today. Yes our bodies will someday suffer the same fate as Jesus, but our spiritual lives - the imperishable part of us can have eternal life until our perishable bodies are also resurrected like Jesus.

And at the same time, we don't have to wait for death to experience the success of the Jesus salvation mission. New life can also be found now; today; in real life.

Easter in real life happens every time someone is sober one more day or one more year.

Easter in real life happens every time a marriage or relationship grows to a new level.

Easter in real life happens when the status quo is challenged to call forth a more just and safe world.

Easter in real life happens when those who speak a language other than that of the majority are seen as an asset instead of a problem.

Easter in real life happens when we care for creation instead of exploiting it.

Easter in real life happens when we stand up to those who mock, tease, or ignore by sharing our lives and privilege with them and resist such behavior.

Easter in real life happens anytime when God calls us to risk ourselves in order that someone else might find new life - that could be a new social life, spiritual life, emotional life, economic life or even physical life.

Easter in real life is the new code God writes on our lives; that opens our hearts and our minds to the needs of others and the needs of that world that makes God's mission of salvation that began in Jesus a success even to this day.

Easter and the Jesus mission worked. Heaven's doors are open and ever since, Easter continues to happen in real life, in real time, with real people like us. Amen!