



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church  
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

## ***“Living Proof”*** **Sermon on Luke 24:1-12**

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Resurrection of the Lord  
Easter Sunday

The resurrection story from the Gospel of Luke. Hear the Word of God!

### ***Luke 24:1-12***

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Janice Kemp, who sings in the choir, forwarded to me an email from her daughter. The email was a “grandma update” on her six-year-old grandson.

It seems that Janice’s 6-year-old grandson learned that a friend of his from school would be joining his family at church for Easter.

"That's great, Mom! Do you know what happens on Easter?" Well, Mom was ready for his answer about the Easter egg hunt at church and the subsequent sugar rush. "That's great, Mom! Do you know what happens at Easter? Jesus comes back to life! My friend is going to meet Jesus at Church!"

"Mom, this is what your grandson said, word for word. Now I'm legitimately worried that he is expecting to meet the man in the flesh on Sunday morning!"

Do you think Mom should worry? Or do you think the boy will meet Jesus in the flesh today? I think she has the right to be worried, it is, after all, church? Who would expect Jesus to show up in church?

I actually thought about that soon after graduating from Seminary. I remember being an associate pastor to a church in Morganton, NC. Brand spanking new pastor. The church was new. Living in the South was new. I had never encountered a "Steel Magnolia" Southern woman in my life. I remember sharing an idea I had for the library with a member, "We're going to do this to the church library!" She just smiled and nodded her head. That didn't mean "yes" in the South. That meant, "Hell, no!" I learned that!

The large Southern Sanctuary was full of strangers. And I couldn't make heads or tails of it. I remember standing outside the Sanctuary on a sunny day, similar to today, and for the life of me, I couldn't figure out why all these people were in church. You would have thought I had that answer before I went into ministry, but I'm slow on the uptick. I think it was because I was a stranger among strangers in the church. It's hard to be a stranger in church. Just ask a stranger.

I remember one of the first strangers beginning to have a name. Phil! Phil was a furniture designer. And during the sermon, he would make a sketch of my sermon. That is to say, he would take the words and draw them out into art! Now I'm telling you, when I first started preaching, people would come up to me and say, "I love your sermons, they're short." I would take the compliment, any compliment!

Phil would draw the sermon and point out the nuances, saying, "Here's where you talked about the seed of corn. Here's the plant. Here's the hand that waters." And he would say, "Here! This is the gospel for me, what spoke to me. This is the word of God for me." And he'd point to the heart or a mystery unfolding. And to have a stranger, who becomes Phil, who listens to the sermon of the kid...drawing out the words into something that saves, well, for me, that was a gift from God. And I don't know what Jesus looks like, but I think he looks like Phil.

I couldn't figure out why people went to church, and then I remembered visiting Irma Dell and Duke Mercer. If you visited them around 5:00 p.m., they'd invite you in for a cocktail. I made sure I was never late. Irmadell drove a '67 forest green Chevy Camaro with about 12 miles on it. It only went to Harris Teeter and back. I loved that car. "Irmadell, when you're done with that car, I'd like to buy it." Her reply, "Oh, no. A preacher should not be seen in a car like that."

I remember Irma Dell landed suddenly in a nursing home. She would sing, and sing loudly. In the middle of the night, the nurses would rush in and stop Irmadell from

singing. "Irmadell, go back to sleep! Why are you singing hymns at 2:00 a.m.?" Irmadell said, "When I sing hymns, I know I'm not alone."

One day, I asked Duke if he'd like to go with me to serve Irma Dell Communion. He said, "Oh, yes I would." We were welcomed into her room; she was so happy to see us. We shared in communion, and Duke gave her a kiss goodbye that was so beautiful I had to look away.

A couple of hours later, Duke called me up, chuckling, asking if I was feeling all right. I said, "Yes." He said, "What do you suppose was in that grape juice we served?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "They just called me, Irmadell just died." And that was Duke! "Duke! I'm so sorry!" He said, "I'm just so glad that the last time I was with her, we were in Communion." Now, I don't know what Jesus looks like, but I think he looks like Duke and Irmadell.

I remember Otto Woerner. He looked like his name. He sounded like his name. He owned a quality leather boot and shoe company. I was amazed by this businessman who would take the time to take me out to lunch. It made me feel more important than I was. I was the associate pastor, and he would take me out to lunch to be his pastor, to be his friend, and he would share with me, help me, and have hope for me. All those things. Otto Woerner! When he sold the company, he took the proceeds and gave it to all his employees. And he said, "Why not? I have enough money. And those employees mean the world to me." Who is the rich one who can say, "I have enough money." Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain brought low. I don't know what Jesus looks like, but I think he looks like Otto Woerner.

I remember the odd duck that was Beverly McMurray. She was a trip. She would never go into the Sanctuary. She'd sit out in the Narthex and listen to the hymns. Anxiety, I guess. Though she never had any anxiety out in the world. In her 70s, she'd drive a brown Chevy pickup truck around the south mountains in Morganton and end up on some stranger's front porch. "Hey, Donovan, I saw this guy and he only had one leg, so I thought I'd stop and talk to him." Then she'd create an oil painting and include the person in it, and it would hang in her collection. Making friends. She told me she drove her pickup out onto the practice range. "Why? To pick up golf balls?" I asked. "No, not golf balls. Bullets."

Beverly stopped by my office one day and said, "Do you think God will mind if I swear at him?" I said, "I think God's big enough to handle it!" And she just let loose right there in my office. Without delay she just let God have it. Every word you'd never say in front of your preacher.

You have to understand, her husband, John, had died of cancer, and now her son John had it, too. Same cancer. When her son died, the service was at a large Methodist church in Charlotte, a big church, packed to the gills. A life well lived. The next Sunday, Beverly wasn't in the Narthex, she was in the Sanctuary. She was standing up and was singing Great is Thy Faithfulness. And friends, when God doesn't answer your prayers, but you're there praising God on a Sunday morning, that's faith! Why have you forsaken me? I don't know what Jesus looks like, but I think he looks like Beverly.

I remember Grace Savage. That was her name – Grace Savage. She was skeptical of anything that came from north of the Mason-Dixon line. And that would have

been me. I went to visit her at home for the interrogation. This little white-haired lady sat in a red leather chair and above her was a six-foot-long Texas long-horn. It was like I was in the Book of Revelation! She interrogated me as to my theology. "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I went into a really good seminary theological conversation about that. "I don't know, basically the best and most innocent person died on the cross. There's really no answer." She just nodded her head and said, "Wrong. It's because of the snake. Don't you remember the snake in the garden?" And I said, "Yes ma'am." She moved on.

"Where are you from?" "Iowa." She didn't know what to do with that. "Have you ever eaten grits?" No ma'am." "Collard greens?" "No ma'am." "Black eyed peas?" "No, ma'am! Ma'am, you have to understand. We're from the north; we won the war and don't have to eat that stuff." She shot me a look and then smiled. I was her project from then on!

I remember her telling me about a time after her husband died. She was home, sitting in her living room. And she couldn't figure out why the traffic didn't stop. Why was there still traffic in front of the house? You know what love is, when you think someone is so wonderful, that the world should stop. I don't know what Jesus looks like, but I think he looks like love. Like Grace Savage.

All of these people are dead and gone. I don't know how they fit into this world of crises. And they don't know the worries of our days. And they don't know how hard it is to believe in God anymore. They don't know.

But they know enough to show up in church! Because I still see Jesus! Because one thing I know better from all my years in ministry is that the risen Lord is found in all of you!

You who march for justice. You who have the bad leg. You who pray for your friend. You who can see the miracle of this day, and you who can't see it for anything. You who sing the hymn, even though you don't know how much time you have left. You who make a conscious effort to do something good. You who are so terrified to make room for God. You who work for peace. You who try to follow and fail! You!

You have the power of salvation!

I say, give those boys some time.

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