

# Welcome

Pre-show: Nathan and I's first date - *Escape Room* + an Escape Room!

Welcome to Easter Sunday at Catalyst!

I've always loved secret messages. When I was a kid, my parents had an Encyclopedia Britannica set (it's like Google in a series of books). Encyclopedias are arranged alphabetically, and in my various explorations of the books, I noticed that on the first page of each letter, the book listed the corresponding Greek letter. So on A, it showed an alpha. On B, a beta and so on.

My spidey-sense started tingling and I knew right away this could be a code language. I copied down each letter, then began 'writing in Greek', simply writing English words with their Greek stand-ins. In case you're wondering, this was not a very good code.

And of course it's not *real* Greek - I had to learn that in college, and if you know any other languages, you know they're much more than just using different letters to make the same words.

Codes are used to hide information in plain sight. The earliest code we've found is almost 4,000 years ago, in an Egyptian pharaoh's tomb. Maybe the most famous is the code used by Julius Caesar to send messages to his generals. Caesar shifted the Latin alphabet three spaces, then wrote his messages. So A would be D, L would be P, etc. The Caesarian code, also known as a 'substitution' is one of the first codes you learn to do today.

Over time, codes got more complex, which led to the creation of encryption and decoder machines. And if you're a spy movie fan like I am, you know about the decoder ring. It was for spies on the go, a way to decipher a secret message on the go.

With the right decoder ring, you have access to information the rest of the world doesn't.

Why all this talk of secret codes and decoder rings? Well, because today is Easter, obviously.

Today is the day we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Today, we explore what it means that 2,000 years ago, Jesus' dead body came back to life and walked out of the tomb in which he'd been buried.

It's easy to get caught up in the spectacle of the moment because hey, even in a superhero movie, the dead coming back to life makes us cheer.

But the thing about Easter is that it's not just a cool thing that happened a long time ago. It's not even *mainly* a cool thing that happened a long time ago.

No, Easter is the first day in a whole new way of being in the world, a way that's hidden in plain sight all around us.

Not unlike a secret code.

What we need is a decoder ring, a way to find the hidden messages God has embedded in the world around us.

Fortunately, Jesus himself is that decoder. His resurrection makes that so. So remember... as we worship today, the Easter key is 8.

## Message

Easter is the biggest day of the church year - bigger than Christmas. Because today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Last week, we celebrate as Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. It was a big celebration, we saw how Jesus rode into the city in a flurry of false expectations about him. No one understood his agenda, what he was up to, and the end result saw him crucified.

Just two nights ago, we gathered to watch as Jesus - God's perfectly faithful follower was crucified precisely because of his faithfulness to God and God's way for us in the world.

Which brings us to today, Easter Sunday. A day that doesn't begin in light and hope. It begins in fear, and despair!

What was at stake on Easter weekend was whose story was true. John tells us in his gospel that Jesus came among us from the Father, as the one who was telling God's good story - a story of liberation and good. But there was another story being told - one of conquest and oppression, a story told by caesars and high priests.

Wars are a battle of messaging. World War II was a battle of secret codes. The Allies were able to win the battle of the Atlantic thanks to mathematician Allan Turing, who worked to break the Germans' Enigma codes. Turing's work became the foundation for modern computers too.

The US turned to the Navajo nation. 29 Navajo men created a code based on the Navajo language that proved to be unbreakable. These famous 'code-talkers' were a key part of the Allied victory over fascism in World War II.

On Good Friday, it looked like Jesus lost, like his story had been drown out by the military march of Rome's legions. So we shouldn't be too surprised that his followers woke up today, on Easter Sunday, not in a spirit of anticipation and excitement, but rather fear and grief.

What they didn't know was that everything had gone according to plan - the Empire had walked right into the trap Jesus had laid for them, and today was the day he won. But before we get there, let's look at how Jesus' followers found out something was up:

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" -- John 20:1–2 (NLT)

We might forgive Mary for her panic here. And it's worth noting that she's the only one who even has the courage to visit the tomb. She sees the stone rolled away and Jesus' body missing so of course she assumes something's gone (even more) horribly wrong. She runs to get Peter and the Beloved disciple and calls them to check it out. They take off for the tomb, and pay attention to what cues them in that we're not dealing with theft, but resurrection:

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home. -- John 20:3–10 (NLT)

What a weird little detail: that the cloth over Jesus' head was lying apart from the rest of the wrappings. Why would *that* cue them in to the possibility that Jesus might be alive?

My New Testament professor Dr. Rodney Reeves had a provocative suggestion. It goes back to the Last Supper, where John tells us the Beloved was sitting next to Jesus, then Peter on the other side of him. Close enough to see that particular way Jesus had of folding the cloth he used as a napkin.

You know those little things about the people you love that make it possible to pick them out of a crowd? I know my wife's laugh - I can pick it out of a loud room instantly.

What if it was the way Jesus had folded up his head cloth, in that particular way he had? Something you'd only notice if you knew Jesus really well. Like well enough that you'd shared dozens of meals with him. What if, in the midst of your anger, fear and grief, you saw *that*.

And you thought... wait a second. No one folds cloth like that except...

Except the guy who's supposed to be dead. Could it be possible...?

Friends, on this Easter, I want to suggest that our path to uncovering where God is at work in the world begins with a deep connection *to* God. God invites us in a deep relationship such that we can recognize these small signs of God's presence in our lives, proof that God is alive and working!

## Songs

Okay okay but what about the secret code, right?

Okay buckle up. We're going to get weird.

John opens his Gospel with the phrase, "In the beginning..." That's an intentional imitation of the opening of Genesis, the first book of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." So John says, "In the beginning was the Word."

'The Word' in John's Gospel is Jesus (for all sorts of very cool reasons we don't have time for today). Short version: John wants us to understand that Jesus' story parallels the creation story. Just as [Genesis 1](#) is about God creating the world, so John's story of Jesus is about Jesus *recreating* the world.

A couple of weeks ago, I told you that John's Gospel only has seven miracles in it, and John calls them *signs*, not miracles. Again, seven should set your spidey sense tingling because the [Genesis 1](#) creation story features God creating over *seven* days. So between 'in the beginning' and 'seven signs' this isn't a particularly subtle code.

So when the early Church read John's Gospel, they became captivated by the number 8. Why? Because 8 comes after 7 (I know... I'm blowing your mind right now!). But seriously... in a seven day week, eight doesn't come after seven. ONE comes after seven. After Saturday, we loop back to Sunday and start all over again.

And, honestly, by Jesus' day, that's how a lot of God's people felt... like time is an endless cycle repeating and folding back on itself. There's always going to be an evil empire, and God's people will always struggle to be faithful (or not). Like it doesn't matter how good or bad today is, because it's all going to repeat over and over forever. No matter how high you climb, you can only get to seven before you fall back down to one and have to start over.

But then Jesus enters Jerusalem. He's crucified on the sixth day and rests (in a tomb) on the seventh day. And then... on Sunday, it's *not* back to business as usual. Instead, something new happens.

Resurrection!

And in case you're thinking this is all a reach, let's look at what happens in [John 20](#), after Peter and the Beloved run off:

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message. -- John 20:14–18 (NLT)

Mary doesn't recognize Jesus - she actually thinks he's the gardener. It's not until he says her name that she realizes who she's talking to (this is like that bit with the napkin, isn't it?!).

So we've had seven signs that mirror the seven days of creation. Now it's either day one or day eight and we have a new sign (resurrection) plus a man and a woman in a garden (which, if you're not good with symbols, is exactly how the creation story plays out in [Genesis 2](#)).

John wants us to be new creation people, eighth day people.

Our mission is Mary's mission - Jesus sends us out into the world to tell people about this new creation, this eight day reality.

We get to tell people that God is alive, that God is at work all around us. Sometimes it's subtle. But the key is that number 8.

What's happening isn't same ole, same ole. It's new creation. New life. New possibility. Liberation and hope.

## Communion + Examen

We meet Jesus in these small elements. They are plain, simple reminders of God's infinite love for us!

In what small ways have I seen evidence of God's love for me in the last week?

What has kept me from seeing God's love this week?

What might keep me from seeing God's love in the week ahead?

How can I be attentive to the small ways God's love is present to me and to the world around me?

## Assignment + Blessing