

In the 2014 film, *God's Not Dead*, college freshman and devout Christian Josh Wheaton finds his faith challenged on his first day of class by a dogmatic and argumentative professor. Professor Radisson begins class by informing students that they will need to disavow, in writing, the existence of God on that day, or face a failing grade. As other students in the class begin scribbling the words “God Is Dead” on pieces of paper as instructed, Josh feels he is at a crossroads, having to choose between his *faith* and his *future*. Josh offers a nervous refusal, provoking an irate reaction from his smug professor. Radisson assigns him an intimidating task: If Josh will not admit that “God Is Dead,” he must prove God’s existence by presenting well-researched, philosophical arguments and evidence over the course of the semester, and then engage the professor in a head-to-head debate in front of the whole class. If Josh fails to convince his classmates of God’s existence, he will fail the course which will block his lofty academic goals. With almost no one in his corner, Josh wonders if he can really fight for what he believes. Can he actually prove the existence of God? Wouldn’t it be easier just to write “God Is Dead” on a slip of paper and put the whole thing behind him? *God's Not Dead* is a film that brings together stories of faith, doubt and disbelief. If you’d like to watch the *Student vs. Professor Debate Scene*, you can easily find it on YouTube.

This morning I don’t intend to *prove* to you with an ontological argument that *God's Not Dead*, even though it’s been done before. If we go back to the 11th century, Anselm of Canterbury championed the ontological argument for God’s existence. It’s a deductive, logic-based argument that insists *the very concept of a supreme perfect being* necessitates his existence in reality. God is defined as “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived,” called the *Greatest Conceivable Being* by philosophers and theologians. Because existence is greater than non-existence, the *Greatest Conceivable Being* must exist in reality and not just in our minds. You see? On this Resurrection Day, I am here to tell you that Jesus the Son of God our Savior IS ALIVE! And because he lives, we shall live also. I’m here to say, **Christ is risen!** [I thought you might say that]

What I want you to *see* in Luke chapter 24 is that the women who went to the tomb very early in the morning were not looking for **proof** of anything. They were looking for a **person**; the person they lived with, learned from, ate with, and prayed with. The “*two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning*” asked the women a question that may be sort of haunting: “***Why do you look for the living among the dead?***” Even in the broader scope of Luke’s Easter story, that question can sound a little disturbing. The women who came with Jesus from Galilee went to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint the body, as was the Jewish custom. When they got there, “***they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.***” Naturally, they went inside. Isn’t that why they came? But then the two messengers suggest an answer of sorts to their odd question: “***He is not here; he has risen!***” (v. 6).

Let’s think about this for a moment: **They weren’t seeking the living!** They were seeking *a corpse!* They hadn’t come to say *hello!* They came to make sure Jesus got a proper Jewish *burial!* In a sense, the question from the two men in gleaming clothes isn’t functionally addressed to the women. **It’s really addressed to us: Why do we seek the living among the dead?** Today I’d like nothing better than for all of us to seriously think about this same question, remembering that Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die*” (John 11:25-26).

So why do we look for Jesus, for life that is eternal, in all the wrong places? For example, one of the ways we look for life is through **entertainment**. We go to movies, sports events, concerts, horse races, and God knows what else we do to be entertained. We play video games and endlessly scroll through social media, like there’s no tomorrow. We watch television for hours at a time, which nowadays has the culturally approved name: “binge watching.” We have an insatiable appetite for entertainment, but, at the end of the day, we’re unfulfilled and empty. **It’s not that any of these forms of entertainment are essentially bad (except maybe social media).** It’s that they only give us a temporary fix, at best. None of them are the source of purposeful living.

Entertainment is one of the places we look for meaningful and abundant lives, but we come up empty-handed. **In fact, you might say, it's a way of *looking for the living among the dead.***

At the beginning of Lent, I told you that we were going to be focused on *Simply Jesus* throughout this season. N.T. Wright, who wrote the book titled, *Simply Jesus*, says that when he wrote his book, he discovered that “Jesus was not simple in his own time and he is not simple now” (*Preface*, p. xi). If someone were to come up to me and say, “I have a simple question: tell me about Jesus,” I might want to explain much more than they were expecting. I'd want to tell them one story after another *about Who Jesus was, about What Jesus did, and about Why Jesus matters.*

We know the familiar words of **the Lord's Prayer** that we pray every time we gather to worship in this place. But I have a hunch that we've never taken a step back to realize what exactly we are praying for. **We are asking that God's kingdom come and God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven! Think about that.** The Jews of Jesus' day believed that God made the world and that he remained in charge of it. They didn't understand any more than we do how a world made by a good God could go so wrong, but clearly that's what has happened. All the signs were there and remain today: broken bodies, broken lives, broken systems, broken countries, broken people. The whole thing needed fixing. It needed to be put right. The story of Jesus' Resurrection is **about the birth of a new creation.** The power that tyrannized the old creation was broken, defeated, overthrown. God's Kingdom was launched, and launched in power and glory, **on earth as in heaven.** A new power is let loose in the world, the power to remake what was broken, to heal what was diseased, to restore what was lost.

When Jesus came he taught his followers to pray and ask that God's kingdom come and God's will be done, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN! He was saying that God is in charge. We could say that with the coming of the Messiah the entire world is *Under New Management.*

On Easter when Jesus rose from the dead, he rose as the new beginning of the new world that God always intended to make. This is perhaps the most important thing to know about the meaning of Easter. The combination of the empty tomb and Jesus' subsequent appearances are the best explanations for everything that happened. You might ask, "Weren't there also stories about this risen Jesus going through locked doors and eventually vanishing upwards into thin air?" Yes, there are. And we have to take those stories seriously too.

But what does the Resurrection mean? The Resurrection of Jesus doesn't mean, "It's all right. Everything's OK. We're going to heaven now." No. **It means the life of heaven is coming to earth!** The *Resurrection and the Life* came to earth and is coming again. The Easter story from Luke 24 is at the end of Luke's story but it's not about an End. It's about a beginning—the beginning of the Kingdom. The world and everything in it is ***Under New Management***.

So, let's return for a moment to the "*two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning*" who asked the women a question: "***Why do you look for the living among the dead?***" Where should we look for the risen Lord today? **In the Scriptures; among God's people; at the Lord's Table; in service to the poor and needy.** A place where I experienced the presence of the risen Christ was on Workcamp trips to economically disadvantaged communities with Ken Mawr high school students. Over the years I learned that those who have the least to offer in terms of material wealth often have the most to offer in terms of spiritual vitality and faith. We travelled to numerous places to serve others, but we came home realizing that it was we who received the greater blessings.

And, if that isn't enough, another good place to look for Jesus is wherever you happen to be, like Saul on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians and to stomp out all this Resurrection nonsense. There are many places where we can go to find a full and purposeful life. So, open your heart this Easter morning and look for signs of Jesus' Resurrection Life all around you and embrace him as your Savior and Lord. Because *God's Not Dead*.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.