

Life is full of surprises. Good surprises. Bad surprises. Unexpected bills. Unexpected pay bonuses. Unexpected pregnancies. Unexpected failed pregnancies. Unexpected promotions at work. Unexpected retrenchments. In a single moment, your day can go from average to excellent, or from average to absolutely horrible. And I'm thinking we've all experiences that at different times of our life.

Last week I got an unexpected bill. And then my wife got an unexpected pay bonus! Sometimes we fell like the glass is half full, other times it's half empty. Sometimes it's overflowing. Sometimes it feels empty. Life can be a rollercoaster. But let me suggest this: It's not surprising. After a while you begin to realize that life often throws us curve balls. Unexpected events. Good and bad. Happy and sad. The unexpected nature of life means that life is perhaps not really surprising at all. That's life.

Easter starts on Good Friday, with the death of Jesus, the Saviour of the world. And it finishes on Sunday with the resurrection. The worst followed by the best. But it's not the sort of event we can simply say: well, that's life. Becsue Easter is a time of extraordinary things. Things unexpected and outside the realm of what we would consider "normal".

Luke 24 shares with us the responses of different people on Easter morning.

First, there were the women –

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some other women went to the tomb of Jesus to prepare his body with spices. And when they get to the tomb, the stone has been rolled away from the entrance, and the body was gone, and two angels say to them (verse 5):

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen!"

And then they say these amazing words in verse 6:

"Remember how he told you?"

They say to the women, this is not surprising! Remember he told you this would happen!

When the women saw Jesus die, they weren't thinking: "Oh that's OK. He'll be back in a couple of days just like he said." Jesus had TOLD them that, but they hadn't really taken it to heart. But then, verse 8:

"Then they remembered his words."

And they went back and told the apostles, our second group of people in this story.

The apostles

And how do the apostles respond? Verse 11:

"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."

Not even surprised. Just thought it was nonsense. Except Peter.

Peter ran to the tomb. He sees the empty grave, the strips of linen. And how does Peter respond? Verse 12:

"And he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."

He's not surprised. He just can't figure out what's happening.

Then the third group of people. Two people –

Cleopas and another guy, were walking down the Emmaus road. They were talking about everything that had happened. And Jesus walks up to them. Except they don't recognize him yet. And Jesus says: "What are you guys talking about?"

And look at their response in verse 18:

"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

In other words: 'Are you living under a rock? Are you kidding? You don't know what we're talking about?'

You see, this was BIG news to **everyone** in Jerusalem. EVERYONE knew what had happened. EVERYONE was talking about it. So they tell Jesus all about the events – the powerful prophet handed over for crucifixion. And in verse 21 they say:

"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."

You see, Jesus was the HOPE for all Israel. He was the one who was going to redeem Israel and save them from the oppression of the Romans. And now Jesus is dead. And his body is gone. The surprise for these two men is that Jesus is dead, and he hasn't saved Israel.

And Jesus gives them a lovely and caring response in verse 25:

"How foolish you are..." he says.

Didn't the prophets talk about this? Didn't the Christ HAVE to suffer? And he explains to them, from the very beginning, the teaching of Moses, the prophets and the whole Scriptures.

He explains to them that this was the plan. Jesus was not there to save them from the Romans. Jesus was not a political figure. Jesus wasn't waging war against the government. He was waging the war to end all wars – he came to defeat sin and death. And this was God's plan all along. No surprises.

So then Jesus sat down with them and ate. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And they understood. And they were excited! And their hearts BURNED WITHIN THEM. They went straight to Jerusalem, found the 11 apostles, and told them everything. Verse 35:

"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

Do you notice here that Jesus didn't "make" people believe. Jesus didn't trick them or convince them. Jesus simply **opened the Scriptures** and helped people see what the plan of God was all along.

Easter Day was no surprise.

The angels said to the **women**: "Remember what he told you"

On the **Emmaus** Road, Jesus just taught them from the Scriptures.

Jesus didn't walk into the room and say: "Surprise! Change of plans. I decided to come back from the dead!"

No. This chapter is saying to us: "This was the plan all along! Look at the Scriptures. Listen to the prophets for the last thousand years. It's all there. Everything points towards Jesus' death and resurrection!"

So as we meet today, is this really a surprise?

III – Do you know, every Wednesday night, I take my garbage bins out to the front curb. And about 5:30am or 6am in the morning, the garbage trucks come and take it away. And about 7:30 or so, maybe 9, maybe 5pm, I go out there and bring in the empty bins. Not once, not EVER, have I opened up the bins and said: "HEY! Where's my garbage?! Who took my garbage?!"
Not once. Why? Because I expect it to happen. I expect every week that my bins will be emptied. It's not a surprise. That's the plan!

And I'm sure we can understand the confusion and disbelief of everyone in Luke 24 because they were coming to grips with the most spectacular, extraordinary event.

But here we are 2000 years later with the text of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the writings and history of Jesus and his followers in the New Testament. Here we have the complete story. ARE WE REALLY SURPRISED?!

Good Friday was garbage night. The night when God took out the trash. The day when the sins of the world were piled on the innocent Jesus. The day when every past, present and future sin of humanity was laid on him. And he took the punishment for us all. Jesus emptied himself of all his majesty, to become the dumping ground for our sin.

And he did that so we can be free from the garbage in our lives. Free from sin. And why is that important?

III – I saw a sign the other day outside a storage facility. It said: **“We Sell Boxes.”** It’s like this big statement. “We sell boxes.” Yes we do. We know you want boxes. And we have them. Now, if you’re looking for boxes, that’s a great sign. Because there they are. They sell them! Yay! It’s probably not even a surprise that a storage facility would sell boxes. But there they are. Now you know.

Easter is the time when **God** hangs out a sign that says, simply:
“I forgive you.”

And what’s important about God’s sign is that unlike the world, God is offering us what we need, for free. And he does this because he loves us.

And if there is **anything** surprising about Easter, this is it. That God loves us. That he offers us forgiveness for all the wrong we’ve done. This is where we should be surprised, again and again. Every day. Our glass is overflowing everyday with forgiveness from God. And we should never STOP being surprised at that. Who else treats us with love like this? To lay his own life down for us, even when our hearts were set against him?

On Good Friday, our garbage was taken out, once and for all. On Easter Day, our bins were found empty. Like an empty Easter egg. Like an empty tomb. Like the empty holes in Jesus’ hands and side. Empty. Free from sin. Forgiven.

And the only surprise here is that God **loves** us that much.

“He is risen” means that sin is taken away, that death is defeated, and that “we are forgiven”.

Like the women, we can simply **remember** this. Like Peter, we can go away **wondering** about it. Or like the 2 men on the Emmaus road, we can accept it and have our hearts **BURN** with the knowledge that Jesus has taken our sin, defeated death, and offered us forgiveness. (Prayer...)