

6-22-25

Connecting the Dots

1 Corinthians 15: 12 - 20

There are some things I don't like to admit, but I will anyway if it affords me the opportunity to use a much-needed sermon illustration. So here it goes:

I used to be a big Seinfeld fan. Now, for those of you who have never heard of Jerry Seinfeld or have never watched his once very popular TV show, I have two things to say to you:

One: I commend you for not stooping so low as to expose yourself to such mind-numbing entertainment. You're obviously a much more mature and spiritual person than I am.

Two: Don't worry. The mother ship will arrive shortly to beam you up and return you safely to the planet from whence you came!

I suppose I enjoyed watching the show, because I related well with some of the psychotic behaviors displayed by the characters- and that made me laugh- and laughing is a good thing.

Michael Ramsey, an early Archbishop of Canterbury, gave some sage advice to a group of men on the eve of their ordination for pastoral ministry. One of the things he said was ...

"Use your sense of humor. Laugh about things, laugh at the absurdity of life, laugh about yourself, and about your own absurdity. We are all of us infinitesimally small and ludicrous creatures within God's universe."

True, but we're no less loved by God.

In my mind, most episodes of Seinfeld just sort of blend together, and except for a few lines like

“No soup for you” or “These pretzels are making me thirsty”,

I have a hard time distinguishing one episode from another – but there is one episode that sticks out in my mind more than all the others – not because of its content since after all, it was a show about nothing, but because of how it aired.

The show was played backwards. What was supposed to happen first ended up being last, and the ending was at the very beginning of the show.

Can you imagine if the producers of other TV shows tried to do this?

Now, I never followed the TV show called 24 – boy, am I dating myself now – that was so long ago, but from what I’ve heard, each episode covers only one hour of a day and is based on a strict sequential order of events. Would this show work if they tried to show it in reverse?

No way! All the suspense would be over in the first five minutes after we witness Keifer Sutherland saving the country once again without a moment to spare.

Not so with Seinfeld. As a matter of fact, the exact opposite effect happened. Seeing Jerry and his quirky friends in India made me immediately wonder, “What crazy chain of events must have transpired to land them over there?”

The hook was set. Now I had to watch the whole thing, so I could see how all the dots connect together.

As many of you are well aware, Summer has officially started. And you know what that means. There will be a general downtick in church attendance.

This is typically due to many people travelling, taking vacations and visiting family who live out of state. Even my family will be gone for the next three Sundays, so it may be a while before we see each other again.

In the meantime I want you to make sure I leave something with you that will help connect the dots when it comes to your faith.

The reason I want to do this is because I want to see everybody back here in the fall, and sometimes during the summer when we want to do so much while the weather is good, that we might start getting out of the habit of coming to church. This would not be good, and one of the reasons why we might stop going is that we forget why we started going to church in the first place!

People stop going to church for all sorts of reasons: health issues, job change, they couldn't find a church they liked nearby them, they didn't connect with anyone in the church. The list goes on and on – and some of these reasons can be legitimate reasons for a season.

But never let the reason be that you failed to connect the dots concerning your faith. In other words, don't stop attending church because you were somehow confused about the most important event that ever took place in human history, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Think about it for a second, what if you were an unchurched person and for some reason, by some miracle you show up at church one Sunday – what would you experience?

I hope the presence of God, but I suspect that's not always the case – you would probably meet some nice people who are welcoming – I hope- but I wouldn't guarantee it. And probably during the sermon you would be introduced to a bunch of big words you've never heard

before unless they were used in a sci-fi movie title like “Resurrection of the Terminated” (Hey, that sounds like the title of a new video game.)

But my point in all this is to say that an unchurched person walking into a Sunday Morning Church service -say at Easter- would probably experience something akin to walking into a TV room in the middle of an episode of 24. He’d see a whole lot of action, but would be left wondering, what’s this all about?

Or here’s another example:

I’m a sports fan- not as diehard as I used to be, but still a fan. If you’re a sports fan, maybe you can relate: so, you’re watching the big game with someone who really doesn’t know a lot about sports. It turns out to be a thrilling finish and when the buzzer buzzes, everybody’s cheering and high-fiving one another – but your friend asks ... so who won?

This is a prime example of failure to connect the dots!

You know what? I don’t want anyone leaving here on Easter morning or any other Sunday morning for that matter, until they’ve had a chance to connect the dots – until they’ve had a chance to clearly understand what Christianity is all about:

-Christianity isn’t about a list of rules or regulations, do’s and don’ts

-It’s not about a reward system that says if you do more right than wrong you’ve punched your ticket to heaven.

-It’s not an organization or club one joins in order to reap certain earthly benefits.

No! Christianity is God’s one and only plan to restore mankind’s relationship to Him.

And do you know how Christians know that God’s plan has worked and is working? One word: resurrection! That’s it! The Resurrection.

Without Christ's bodily resurrection from the grave, Christianity would cease to exist.

Think about it. Can you name one person in the Gospels who actually believed that Jesus would return to life again after being dead 3 days?
No one!

Mary and the women who went to the tomb?

I think not – They were bringing spices to embalm Jesus' dead body.

The disciples?

Hardly! They were running scared and hiding.

How about those two guys travelling on the road to Emmaus?

Don't think so. They were depressed. They had no hope or belief whatsoever in a resurrected Jesus.

These facts alone shoot holes in what is sometimes called the hallucination theory that states that people only hallucinated Jesus' resurrected body. But from my understanding of hallucinations, the typical people who have hallucinations are those who are looking for them!

No one was looking for Jesus to rise again. Besides, how do the hallucination theorists explain 500 people all having the same hallucination at the same time?

Now, I'll grant you this: no one, according to the Bible, ever witnessed Christ's resurrection. People saw Jesus after the rose, but no one was present to actually witness the event itself. This fact however, doesn't rule out the possibility that it indeed happened.

As a matter of fact, we have at least three convincing lines of evidence that logically demonstrate that Christ was raised:

First, we have the empty tomb.

All four gospels agree that Jesus' body was placed in the tomb after his crucifixion and that two days later the tomb was empty. This is not a disputed fact. Even Jesus' enemies agreed that Jesus' body was gone.

So where did it go?

Did Jesus' friends take it? Doubtful – the enemies of Jesus secured a guard over the tomb to prevent any grave robbing -and even more problematic for the skeptics is the point that the early disciples suffered for preaching the resurrection. If they had stolen the body, do you think they would have been ready to suffer unto death for saying Jesus Rose when in fact they knew differently? Not likely.

The idea that Jesus' enemies removed the body is no better.

By taking Jesus' body they would have actually encouraged resurrection stories – the exact thing they wanted to prevent. And if they did take the body, why would they not have produced it for all to see?

This would have disproved the Resurrection once and for all. As one scholar aptly wrote: “the silence of the Jews is as significant as the speech of the Christians.”

Second, we have the post-resurrection appearances of Christ:

Five written accounts tell of 10 different appearances by Jesus after his resurrection – five on the first day and five more spread over forty days- and great variety exists among the witnesses.

Women were the first to see Jesus and this lends credence to its truth.

A manufactured story would have indicated only men saw the resurrected Lord, for Jews did not accept the testimony of a woman. Josephus records the rule: “from women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of the sex.”

But Jesus also appeared to one person, to two (on the road to Emmaus) to the Eleven and to more than 500.

Especially important is Christ's appearance to Paul, an intelligent and well-educated man with one big chip on his shoulder against Christians. But he was emphatic that he was with the risen Christ and it altered the whole course of his life.

Third: We have the experience and existence of the Christian Church.

The conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead transformed the first disciples. When the women told the eleven that they had seen Jesus alive, *"the words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them,"* records Luke.

Yet these same people who did not believe, shortly afterward risked imprisonment and even death as they preached Jesus and the resurrection.

What could have caused this astounding transformation?

It must have taken hard evidence to convince people like Peter, Thomas, and Paul. Yet they were convinced that Jesus had risen. That people were imprisoned and that others suffered death for their belief is significant.

When confronted with such great perils, people are apt to look for alternative explanations to avoid pain/hardship, but the disciples stood firm: they were sure of the Resurrection.

How about you, are you sure of Christ's resurrection?

And do you know what it means for you personally?

Christ's resurrection means God exists and He is incredibly powerful – after all, he vanquished humanity's greatest enemy – sin and spiritual death on the cross. Christ destroyed our enemy, sin. His resurrection proves He is the victor.

Christ's resurrection means that God is personal and intimately involved in His Creation, for the resurrection followed death.

Why would God ever put himself in a position to die? He's God after all! He did so for you and me. Paul writes in Philippians that Christ,

“though being very nature God made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant – so that he could experience death for us.”

Christ's resurrection shows that Jesus is holy and righteous.

The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. This is why Christ could not be held in the grave. He is holy and righteous and did not deserve to die.

Christ's resurrection demonstrates He is worthy of our allegiance and worship.

During His earthly ministry, Christ foretold of his death and resurrection on numerous occasions.

The fulfilling of the prophecy puts a stamp and seal of approval on all he did and said.

Jesus truly is God and deserves all our praise and worship. Hopefully this connects some of the dots for you and hopefully it's connecting to your heart...

God Bless you all. The Lord willing, I'll see you again in July. Amen.