

Resurrection and Commissioning

SPEAKER Frank Costenbader

DATE Sunday, April 27, 2025

PASSAGES John 20; John 1; Luke 24; John 10; Ezekiel 36

MESSAGE Begins at 1:07:32 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Easter is not a tidy sunrise. It is God reaching grieving, frightened, unbelieving people — speaking Mary’s name, showing Thomas the scars — and then breathing his own life into them and sending them out. The resurrection makes followers into family, and family into messengers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ All four gospel accounts differ in their details, but three things run through every one of them: Jesus was crucified and buried, he rose on the third day, and none of his followers believed it.
- ◆ The disciples were not being obtuse — they were in shock. Frank, who has worked as a hospital chaplain, said the more traumatic the death, the more profound the grief, and John 20 should be read with that in mind.
- ◆ Mary came to the tomb in the dark carrying the only thing she had left to bring: love. She was looking in the wrong direction until Jesus said her name.
- ◆ The message Mary is sent with is not merely that Jesus is alive. It is “my Father and your Father” — adoption, not just forgiveness.
- ◆ On a corpse, wounds only show what killed a man. On the risen Christ, they are credentials for ministering to a suffering world.
- ◆ Jesus breathed on the disciples as God breathed into Adam — a foretaste of Pentecost, and the power without which the commission cannot even begin.

- ◆ Evidence, however well assembled, never made a believer. The Holy Spirit draws; then comes surrender, and only after surrender can you get up and follow.
- ◆ A commission in church government dissolves when its job is done. This one does not dissolve until Christ returns.

► 1:07:32

Frank opened by admitting he was not Mark Kroger, waited out a buzzing microphone, and then prayed the words he says he begins every sermon with —
“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight”.
Matt Axe had asked him to take the first Sunday after Easter; his daily lectionary reading for the date turned out to be John 20.

Easter is more complicated than a celebration

► 1:10:22

People like to simplify Easter, Frank said, and there is plenty to celebrate — but God was doing a great deal in it, and John flagged that in his first chapter.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world... I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

JOHN 1:29–33 ↗

Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20 all tell the same event differently — one angel or two, an earthquake, Galilee or a locked room, an invitation to touch him, a request for something to eat. Frank called these recollections, each writer keeping what struck him. Three things are common to all of them: Jesus was crucified and buried, he rose on the third day, and not one of his followers believed it.

What the plan actually was

► 1:13:18

The disciples seem to have expected an insurrection against Rome, even while doubting it would work. They knew the danger — as far back as John 11:16, Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” But Jesus named a different fight:

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” He had come to be a sacrifice — not to plate Rome, but to satisfy God and set people free from their sins.

Three times he said so plainly, the last of them on the road up to Jerusalem (Matthew 20:18–19) — betrayed, condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified, raised on the third day. In the very next verses the mother of James and John kneels down to ask for the seats at his right and left. “Didn’t she hear what Jesus just said?” Frank asked. “No — that’s the point. Nobody did.”

► [1:16:35](#)

Only after the sham trial, the mocking, the gambling for his clothes, did Jesus cry out the opening line of Psalm 22 — a psalm that had described his tormentors’ actions centuries in advance. Frank counted more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection and ascended life, and put God’s own claim beside them: Isaiah 42:9 and “I declare the end from the beginning... my counsel shall stand.”

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

[LUKE 24:44–45](#) ↗

Read John 20 with the grief still in it

► [1:20:12](#)

Frank spent years as a hospital chaplain, and he asked the room to bring that experience to the text. Grief is not uniform: some are vocal, some want family close, some run because they need to be alone. What is common is shock — a numbness that lasts days — and the more traumatic the death, the more profound the grief. The disciples had watched him die.

He quoted a commentary describing the discovery of the empty tomb as “the quiet dawning of a new day, heralding the defeat of the night,” and then rejected it. Beautiful, he said, but wrong. Remember the grief. Remember the aftershock, the stone moved, the guards lying like dead men.

Mary, and a name spoken in the dark

► [1:22:02](#)

John highlights Mary Magdalene, who has nothing to bring but love. Jesus had sought her out, set her free, given her a family. She comes in what John calls “early” — the Greek names the dawn watch, roughly three to six in the morning, still dark — and finds the stone moved.

Frank told about walking out one morning to find a car door ajar, both radios and everything of value gone, and how hard it was to accept what his eyes were telling him. Mary’s questions were worse: had his enemies desecrated the body, stolen it, added one more indignity? Why couldn’t they leave him alone? She runs, and her words give her away — “*we* do not know where they have laid him.” Others had been with her. They are still working on the location of a body.

► 1:24:21

Peter and John run. John stoops at the entrance and sees the linen cloths; Peter goes straight in and finds the grave clothes folded. Then John goes in, “and he saw and believed.” Frank refused the sentimental reading: it makes nice theater to say he believed in the resurrection right then, but the very next verse says they still did not understand the Scripture ([John 20:8–9](#)). What John believed was Mary. The body was gone.

► 1:26:15

Mary stays behind, weeping, and stoops to look in — two angels, then a voice behind her. She had been looking in the wrong direction. Notice, Frank said, that Jesus asks *whom* she is seeking, not what. Taking him for the gardener, she offers to carry the body away herself, one last way of showing love. And then he says her name.

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

JOHN 20:16 ↗

“My sheep hear my voice” ([John 10:27](#)). She turns — a change of direction, from grief to joy, from death to life — and falls at his feet.

Not followers. Family.

► 1:28:27

The message she is handed is astonishing: “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” ([John 20:17](#)). He had already called them friends, which was remarkable enough. This is more.

“You can forgive acquaintances who’ve sinned against you. You can forgive friends,” Frank said. “But this is a lot more than forgiveness. This is adoption. Sons and daughters of the living God.” He works daily with people addicted to drugs and alcohol who feel owned by the addiction, and he was blunt about the limits of pardon alone: their families have forgiven them over and over, and unchanged, it will just happen again. Not if you are transformed. “We are God’s children now.”

Mary — the woman who had been delivered of seven demons, the first person to see the Lord — is commissioned as the first messenger of the resurrection. Frank pressed the authority behind it:

“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to

Behind locked doors, and the scars

► 1:31:28

The disciples are gathered in grief and fear, certain that sooner or later Rome or the Jewish leadership will come for them. Frank turned that on the room: “Perhaps the church today is really behind closed doors — fearful, living on the wrong side of the resurrection. The problems are so big, the enemy seems so powerful. What can be done but hide in the sanctuary, singing?”

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

JOHN 20:19–20 ↗

He was not telling them to relax; he was bestowing peace. And on a dead body those wounds would only show what killed him — on a risen body they are proof that the crucified Jesus is the risen Christ. “Those wounds are his credentials for ministering to a suffering world.” Jesus as teacher and model, Frank said, is a terrifying prospect: good luck measuring up. What we need is a resurrected God with the power to change us.

Breathed on, and sent

► 1:34:38

As a Presbyterian minister, Frank has sat on plenty of commissions — a body given a specific job, which dissolves the moment the job is finished. This one, he said, will not dissolve until Jesus comes again in glory. And it cannot be started on human energy. As God breathed life into Adam, Jesus breathes on these men: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21–22) — a deposit, a foretaste of Pentecost, with the instruction from Luke 24:49 still standing: wait for the power.

They are then given a share in his priestly work. Only Jesus forgives — it is his blood that cleanses — but those he has breathed on are made a forgiving, healing people, given a discerning word that releases the burden of sin. In small groups and one-on-one, Frank said, we hear hidden pain and long-carried wrongdoing, and we can pray people toward the risen Jesus and pronounce in his name what he has already done. “I’m not forgiving them, but I am saying the Lord does.”

► 1:37:24

That is why testimony carries power. Sharing the good news academically with someone torn apart will not work; you have to reach out in reality, the way Jesus reached out to his own disciples. Frank speaks three times a week at the Salvation Army, where he watches the Spirit move among a hundred or so men — some drawn and responding, others withdrawing and mocking. He set that beside [John 6:44](#): no one comes unless the Father draws him.

Thomas, and the friends who go get you

► 1:39:38

Thomas — an identical twin, as Frank is — had been the one ready to go to Judea and die. For him the crucifixion was simply the end, and he had cut himself off. Frank pushed back on the nickname: he was not doubting so much as unbelieving. Told “We have seen the Lord,” he asked for proof.

Frank’s own story ran the same way. “I arrogantly said that I didn’t want an imaginary friend. If I could not have objective proof, seeing and handling, I would not believe — which is abject rebellion.” What eventually undid him was not an argument: his Christian friends were changing in front of his eyes and he was not. One of them challenged him to take a step of faith without proof, and he prayed and asked Jesus into his life.

The other disciples went and found Thomas, the way that friend came after Frank, and eight days later he was in the room. “In every generation there are those who’ve patiently and lovingly built relationships so that they can bring an honest seeker to meet Jesus.” Bring them to a small group, to coffee, to church. They may seem a little weird. That’s okay.

► 1:43:40

Jesus comes again through locked doors, again with peace, and deals with Thomas not by argument or condemnation but by offering himself: look, and touch, and do not disbelieve but believe.

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

JOHN 20:28-29 ↗

“When Thomas says this, it’s not a statement. It’s a surrender.”

Evidence is not enough. Surrender is the door.

► 1:45:49

John ends by saying he could not record everything, and that what he has written is more than enough (John 20:30-31). Frank praised *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* as well done — and called it totally insufficient. Unless the Spirit is drawing you, you will not come to faith; and when he is drawing you there is a battle, because you have to let go of what you have clung to. Mary was clinging to his feet, holding a clear image of who he *was* rather than who he *is*.

Plenty of people, Frank said, hover on the periphery: yes, I believe Jesus is the Son of God — but I am not going to surrender to him. “It’s only after we surrender to him that we can get up and follow him.” He has no interest in sitting around waiting for the second coming. There is a commission, and it is varied. His own turned out to be nothing like the one he imagined: he wanted to be Billy Graham, and was told, “No, you’re a shepherd.” God knows our personalities and has a plan for every one of us — but surrender comes first.

► 1:48:49

He closed where the power comes from — John 16:7, Jesus going to the Father and sending the Spirit — and with the promise underneath it all:

“I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”

EZEKIEL 36:24-28 ↗

We keep the law because we want to, Frank said — not to earn anything, but because a new heart knows that is where it will prosper. Then he invited anyone who had never asked Jesus into their life, and anyone who had but had never really surrendered, to do it now, and called the prayer ministry teams forward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Psalm 19:14
- John 1:29–33
- Matthew 28
- Mark 16
- Luke 24
- John 20
- John 11:16
- John 12:31
- Matthew 20:18–19
- Psalm 22:1
- Isaiah 42:9
- Isaiah 46:10
- Luke 24:44–45
- John 20:8–9
- John 20:16
- John 10:27
- John 20:17
- 1 John 3:2
- John 10:18
- John 20:19–20
- John 20:21–22
- Luke 24:49
- John 6:44
- John 20:28–29
- John 20:30–31
- John 16:7
- Ezekiel 36:24–28

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Frank refused the “quiet dawning of a new day” reading of the empty tomb and insisted on the grief and shock. What changes when you read John 20 as a story about traumatized people?
2. Mary was looking in the wrong direction until Jesus spoke her name. Where have you been searching for something Jesus was standing right beside you offering?
3. “My Father and your Father” — adoption, not just forgiveness. Which of the two do you actually live as though is true of you?
4. Frank said his scars are what let him reach people torn apart by life. What part of your own story have you kept out of your testimony, and what would honesty about it make possible?
5. He drew a line between believing and surrendering. Name one thing you are still clinging to, and what surrendering it would look like this week.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Frank Costenbader is a Presbyterian minister who was invited by Matt Axe to preach the first Sunday after Easter. He reads Scripture daily from a lectionary and opens every sermon with Psalm 19:14. He has worked as a hospital chaplain, works with people struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, and speaks three times a week at the Salvation Army. An identical twin, he came to faith late after years of demanding objective proof.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXxqzpctGRw&t=4052s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.