

April 4, 2010    Easter Sunday            *Life on Mars? Life on Earth?*  
1 Corinthians 15:17-26; John 20:1-18

It all began with this huge stone. 13,000 years ago a huge stone fell from the sky and impacted the earth. This huge stone that fell from the sky was a meteorite and it struck the earth with such force that it scattered pieces of itself across the Antarctic. Pieces of this meteorite were discovered in 1984 and as scientists have studied these pieces they have discovered that this huge stone was a fragment of the planet Mars. Broken loose into space some 15 million years ago by a similar impact—a fragment of Mars that traveled through space until its journey violently ended in that ice field. More recently David S. McKay and Everett K. Gibson, Jr., of NASA were studying one of those pieces of this huge stone and you know what they discovered and announced to the world. Embedded in this small fragment of the planet Mars are chemicals and compounds, they said, that are only produced as the byproducts of the process of life, fossils of microorganisms that may have existed on Mars some 3.6 billions years ago. They raise the issue then based on this empirical evidence that life may have existed on Mars. Since that time other meteorite fragments have been similarly identified, some that have been on display in museums for years. This could be the year, given advances in technology, that scientists may be able to determine unequivocally if life has ever been on Mars.

But they are not there yet because much of the empirical data has yet to be answered. But it is not so much the empirical questions that draw us to this mystery. It is fascinating, isn't it? Life is fascinating. We are somehow drawn to its mystery. What draws us is our sense that there might be more to the universe than we first thought. There might be more to life than what we now experience. This is not so much an empirical questions as it is a heart question. We are somehow drawn to the mystery. Was life on Mars?

It all began with this huge stone. 2,000 years ago early in the morning on the first day of the week, a woman came to a tomb and saw that a huge stone that once sealed the grave had been rolled back. Frightened,

full of fear, she too was drawn to the mystery—the mystery of life. She ran to tell friends of Jesus and they raced to the gravesite, went inside, and found the linen burial wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been about the head rolled up in a place by itself. They were drawn to the mystery. The woman is so shattered by the experience that she sobs and weeps until finally through her tears she cries out to on she thinks to be the gardener, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” When it is her Lord who calls her by name, she recognizes him. She runs and announces to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”

On this Easter Sunday, aren't you drawn to the mystery? The fascinating mystery of life. What draws you this morning is your sense that there must be more to the universe than you first thought—there must be more to life than you now experience. You are somehow drawn to its mystery. Is life on Earth? Real life? Not just day-to-day survival? Not just pain and suffering and disappointment but hopeful, meaningful, fulfilled life...even eternal life? These are not so much empirical questions but heart questions. You are here because there is something going on in your heart. You are drawn to its mystery this morning by the Easter message.

The Apostle Paul says it well in his letter to the church at Corinth. He says,

*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

You see, he addresses some folks in the community who are having a hard time believing in the resurrection. They were called to its mystery. Their hearts yearned for its truth. They believed that Jesus rose from the dead but some of them had a hard time believing that the life among them in Christ could actually transform their everyday, day-to-day, down to earth existence. Some of them thought that that life in their midst brought about by the resurrection somehow separated them from the hard knocks and hard choices of daily life. They felt there just had to be more than this—they knew there must be more to life than what they experienced. Some of them believed that the power of Jesus

somehow elevate them to an insulated plain of otherworldliness—a place where God takes you away from the difficulties and ordinariness of life; a place, you know, where God is. For God certainly could not be in the very muck and mire of life as we know it. God must be at another higher place apart from this mess we live in, they believed.

They were drawn to the mystery. And some of them concluded that the Christian life meant an existence which denied the reality of everyday life. Day to day living, they said, was an illusion. Real life in God is a life filled with spiritual ecstasy and enthusiasm requiring special knowledge which leads you to this truth.

The Apostle Paul was so concerned about this misunderstanding, this aberration of the Christian message that he wondered aloud whether these folks actually believed in the resurrection at all. Paul knew that in the resurrection of Jesus, everyday life was transformed by the real presence of Christ in the world right now. Christ was raised from the dead, so life now is different, new, and that new life lasts forever. Paul takes great pains, then, to name all the empirical evidence he can that confirms Jesus' resurrection: Jesus appeared to Peter, the twelve, to more than 500 at the same time, to James, then all the apostles, then to Paul himself.

As Paul worries about some of the Corinthians perhaps he would have good reason to worry also about you and me. Do we believe in resurrection? Do you ever wonder whether resurrection can ever actually transform your everyday, day-to-day, down-to-earth existence? We are alive, you know. You already know that. That's why you are here this morning. And you have a hunch that this resurrection—this life does more for you than just fill you with spiritual ecstasy and enthusiasm now and then. We want to believe that this life does more for you than simply make you religious. You are drawn to its mystery because deep down inside you know that eternal life has got to be more than the same old thing that just lasts forever.

Like some of the Corinthians perhaps you believe Jesus rose from the dead but you misunderstand what resurrection means. Paul would have good reason to worry about us this morning also, whether we believe in resurrection at all. He would write to you as he wrote to the Corinthians, listing all the evidence and naming all the witnesses of the resurrection.

But in the end all the empirical evidence in the world will not convince you. You know that. Paul knows that. That's because the questions the Corinthians asked then, the questions you ask this morning, are not empirical questions, they are heart questions. No amount of empirical evidence can ever really satisfy the heart.

In the movie *Contact* Jodie Foster plays the part of an astronomer whose father died while she was still quite young. It was her father who had instilled in her a love of the stars. She also learned from him the value of empirical evidence. Her scientific mind would only consider the truth of things proven by the scientific method. Her approach to life always had the connotation to it: "Prove it to me." One evening as she and her boyfriend were gazing up at the stars. He had often chided her about her obsession about proof that led her to even seek scientific proof for things that can only be known through faith. As they looked skyward she asked him, "Do you believe God exists?" "Yes," was his reply. She looked at him and said, "Can you prove it?" In response he looked at her and said, "Let me ask you a question. Do you believe your father loved you?" "Yes" was her reply as tears came to her eyes. Then he said, "Can you prove it?"

It is not an empirical question. It's a heart question. It's what's going on in your heart that counts. Listen to your heart this Easter Sunday. Your heart tells you there's got to be more than this. There has got to be more to life than

The disappointment in not making the grade you worked so hard  
for

The hurt when your friend turns her back on you

The depression when life does not seem to go your way

There has got to be more to life than

The limitation of mind and body brought on by the reality of age  
The daily financial struggle when social security doesn't pay the  
bills anymore

The void left by the death of a loved one

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ only serves to make you more religious...we really don't believe in resurrection at all. That's why you are drawn to its mystery this morning. Jesus Christ became a human being just like you. The Son of God lived life just like yours. Jesus of Nazareth was disappointed, hurt, and depressed just like you. He knew your limitations and struggles. He felt that void in his own heart. Upon the cross of Calvary all the forces that serve to beat you down every day utterly defeated him and he died right there at their hand. But this morning as the sun rose, amid the tossed and rolled up garments, in the garden Jesus calls a woman by name and she declares, "I have seen the Lord!" In that moment the very power of the forces of this world that would beat you down every day are defeated forever. They have no more ultimate power over you no matter how frequent or how strong their hold in your life. Through the resurrection Jesus lives in your heart if you'll let him, transforming your everyday life for now and forever. It really is a heart question.

What's going on in your heart this morning? As you sift through the evidence what is your life like on earth?

This is not an empirical question. This is a heart question. It is a question that only finds an answer when you finally hear your Lord speak your name this morning, and you finally recognize him, and your heart cries out, "I have seen the Lord!"

William G. Davidson