

“RUNNING ON EMPTY”<sup>1</sup>

(John 20:1-9)

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**[PROPS NEEDED: "SermonSpice.com" Video]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 4-9-23]

--I--

1. [At Beginning of ALL Services: **WATCH VIDEO** "He's Gone- Easter SD" ([SermonSpice.com](https://www.sermonspice.com), by Big Picture Media Group, Time: 1:53)]

2. [11am Service ONLY... Read Text: John 20:1-9 and Pray.]

3. As human beings, we don't generally like things that are empty, do we?

A--When we have an *empty* stomach, for instance, we feel hungry and want something to eat to fill it up.

B--As children, when we see an *empty* cookie jar or empty cake plate, we don't like it because that means there's no more cookies or cake for us to eat! <sup>2</sup>

C--As sports fans, we see a big "0" in our teams' score box and we're not happy, because at the very least, it means they are not *winning* the game.

D--When the fuel gauge in our car reads *empty*, we know we're in trouble, because it means we're out of fuel and we may be lucky to make it to a gas station or charge point to fill up!

E--When the little battery icon on our smartphone or tablet shows *empty*, we panic because we're out of power, and we know it's time to recharge!

F--And I'll be honest... like any preacher, I don't enjoy looking out across a congregation on Sunday morning seeing *empty* seats in the Sanctuary during worship, or even seeing a "0" by the number of views for online worship (which is one reason I love Easter Sunday... because we're always full, and there are plenty of online views!)

5. Yet, oddly enough, the very best news in all of history is, "It's empty! He is not here!"

A--[9am ONLY.... Listen to what I mean as found in today's scripture from John 20:1-9:  
*1 Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." 3 Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. 4 They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. 5 Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't*

*go in. 6 Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. 8 Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead"*

A--[11am ONLY... we heard that message very loud and clear in today's scripture that you just heard read from John 20:1-9]

B--Think about it: on that first Easter morning over 2000 years ago, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid two days before to embalm it, according to Jewish custom.

C--But when she arrived, she found the stone seal removed, and the tomb itself empty.

1--Verses 2-4 tell us that Mary "*ran*" back to tell Peter and another disciple, and that those two then took off "*running*" to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>

2--And it says that when they arrived, huffing and puffing, out of breath from their frantic run, they saw the same thing Mary had seen: an empty tomb where Jesus' body had once been.

D--And from other accounts we learn that, later that day & continuing for several weeks, Mary, Peter, and other disciples all experienced various encounters with the risen Jesus, and that news of this resurrection begins to spread throughout the known world.

6. But remember that all of this started when Mary *ran* to share the news of a tomb that was *empty* -- I.E., it started when Jesus' first followers began "*Running on Empty*."

A--Today, over 2000 years later, we his Church (the Church of Jesus Christ) are still "*Running on Empty*" -- we're still celebrating and sharing the good news of the *empty* tomb with those who will listen and receive it.

B--But **what does that really mean? What power does the "good news" of the empty tomb hold for our lives today?**

--II--

7. Well, I want to answer that first by coming back to our discomfort with "emptiness" that I mentioned at the beginning of this message and clarifying that *that* discomfort is really caused by a tension/paradox in our personal lives and relationships.

A--Think about it:...

1--Most of us are "*full*" of life's "riches" -- compared to the rest of our world, we here in America have nice homes, nice cars, adequate savings; and what we *don't* have, we just borrow (whether we have the money or not!)

2--Yet, even with all these "things," our souls and spirits quite often feel *empty*.

B--We live in a society which thinks of itself as "*full*" because we're fully "connected" by social media and all our technology.

1--But again, despite these technological "connections,"...

2--...Often our *relationships* are more shallow, superficial, and unsatisfying (that is: more "*empty*") than ever before.

C--My point is that while many of us *seem* to be "full" and "have it all together" on the *outside*, quite often we're actually "empty" on the *inside*.

1--Oh, we go through the *motions* of life, but we're not really *living* -- we pretend to be engaged with the world around us, but we're really just running on auto-pilot.

2--Ten years ago (2013) there was a movie called "*Warm Bodies*" -- did anyone see it? It was a strange, romantic comedy about 2 characters in a world of cold, lifeless zombies who at first don't even know how "dead" they are, but who -- through a series of events -- learn to become alive (i.e. "warm") once again

3--As strange as all that sounds, *that's* a good description for our world today! And whether we acknowledge it or not, it's unfortunately also a good description of many people (perhaps even some of *us*) today, as well: empty, lifeless beings, trapped in a dead world, trying to find meaning and purpose.

D--All that I've just said could very much describe the so-called "life" of my 1st roommate in college, who I'll call "John" -- while he was outwardly into the party life, with booze, drugs, and girls, on his more lucid days he would at times confide in me that those things didn't really bring him meaning, satisfaction, or lasting joy.

8. Yet, the "good news" of Easter's empty tomb is that you and I can find *freedom* from the "deadness" of the kind of "life" that "John" was living!

A--The story of Jesus' resurrection is that you and I can experience real *fullness* of life, even in the midst of the spiritual and emotional "deadness" of our world!

[Remember Jesus once said "*I came that they* [meaning 'we'] *might have life, and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10) --NOTE: not just *any* life, but *abundant*, "*full*" life!]

B--Easter is about us receiving the ability to get off the "merry-go-round" of life to discover the beauty and glory of God's world in and all around us.

C--It's about us realizing that neither the internet, nor social media, nor religious activities, nor addictive behaviors can ever lead us to find true purpose or meaning in life,...

D--...And that the *only* way we can find these is through a relationship with the God who created us, and for whom our hearts are restless *until* we rest in Him. <sup>4</sup>

E--And that's exactly what happened for my roommate "John" -- in his Sophomore year, he discovered and claimed a personal relationship with God through Jesus, and his earthly life changed forever (he's now a career youth minister).

--III--

9. Of course, the irony of all of this is that Easter accomplishes these things *not* through a message of might & "fullness," but through a paradoxical/ironic message about the power of "*emptiness*":

A--God takes the *emptiness* of our hearts and fills it with the power of *His presence*.

B--He takes the *hopelessness* of our lives and ignites the power of *hope* once more.

C--He takes the *sorrows* of our "empty tombs" and replaces them with the power of *joy*.

D--He takes the *hatred, fear, divisions and prejudice* of our world and transforms these into honor, respect, and unity in him through the power of His *love*.

E--He takes the *meaninglessness* of suffering and death, and gives it resurrection *purpose*.

F--And He takes the *brokenness* of our *human* relationships and provides a way of *healing* through the power of a relationship with *Himself*.

10. Put another way: the paradox of Easter is that it's a story about the power of "*Running On Empty*" -- a story that teaches us how to "*run*" the "race" we call "life" through the power of the "good news" of the *empty* tomb of Jesus Christ.

A--An old Bill Gaither hymn used to say it this way:

*"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.*

*Because He lives, all fear is gone.*

*Because I know He holds the future,*

*And life is worth the living just because He lives."* <sup>5</sup>

B--So, is Jesus alive in *your* heart today? Or is your heart empty inside, with Jesus only existing in a superficial "religious" world on the *outside*?

C--Is Easter a *reality* deep in your soul? Or is it merely a holiday on the calendar?

1--Are you, like so many other people today, merely "*Running...*" with an "*emptiness*" in your life?

2--Or are you, like Mary and the Disciples, "*Running*" your life on the power of the tomb that was "*Empty*"?

11. [PRAYER]

12. [A/V: Following Benediction, play Jackson Browne's song "*Running on Empty*" in background as congregants exit...]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Today's message was inspired by a devotional written by Jonathan Truax for the 5th Sunday in Lent, found in The Upper Room daily devotional (March 25, 2012 -- [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org)).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, it's true that as parents we *do* like seeing our children bringing us empty plates, because that means that they ate all their food. But that's only true if they have food *to begin with* -- millions of children around the world have empty plates *all the time* because there's not enough food to feed them.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew's version (Matthew 28:8) says that "*they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples...*".

<sup>4</sup> Early Christian leader Saint Augustine once wrote "*We were made for you, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*"

<sup>5</sup> Bill Gaither's song "*Because He Lives*," United Methodist Hymnal #364