

SIX KEYS TO ETERNAL LIFE



Scripture:

Luke 24:28-35

Opening our minds to the scriptures

²⁸Then he said to them, ‘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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ ²⁹Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ³⁰and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah ³¹is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ³²and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ³³You are witnesses ³⁴of these things. ³⁵And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

Matthew 28:16-20

The mission of the disciples

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’



CAPTAIN RICHARD PHILIPS

Here is a story we are watching this morning off the coast of Africa:

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) - Cheering and guarded by Navy Seals, the crew of an American ship reached a Kenyan port Saturday evening without their captain, still held hostage by Somali pirates in a lifeboat hundreds of miles from shore.

Capt. Richard Phillips, 53, of Underhill, Vermont, was seized Wednesday when he thwarted the takeover of the 17,000-ton U.S.-flagged Maersk Alabama, which was carrying food aid for hungry people in Somalia, Rwanda and Uganda.

Crew members said that as the pirates boarded his cargo ship, Phillips had told his crew to lock themselves in a cabin and surrendered himself to safeguard his men.

"He saved our lives!" second mate Ken Quinn, of Bradenton, Florida, declared from the ship as it docked in the resort and port city of Mombasa. "He's a hero."

The crew later overpowered some of the pirates but the Somalis fled with Phillips to an enclosed lifeboat, the relatives said.

One member of the crew looked out at the assembled journalists who were shouting questions at him (as they were anchored in Kenya), and after a pause said: "You're a bunch of ... leeches. Don't disrespect these men like that. (We've) got a man out on a lifeboat dying so we can live."

Isn't it interesting that in the difficult times our county is going through, people still do Jesus-like things.

CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES SUMMON THE HERO IN SOME PEOPLE.

The “Unconquerable Human Spirit” is one of the themes of Easter, and when we see that unconquered spirit we are inspired. I pray for a peaceful resolution to this lawless act without the loss of life.

A man on a lifeboat offering up his life for fellow sailors reminds us why we are here today. Sometimes the story outlasts the characters. Sometimes the lesson lasts beyond the theater in which it is learned.

We have great respect for people who actually do courageous things, rather than just portraying them in a movie where the outcome is more predictable. Even our enemies have respect for this kind of courage. Let’s remember who the real heroes are.

PEOPLE STILL DO JESUS-LIKE THINGS.

Why do they do them?

- Because there is something courageous deeply imbedded in the human spirit.
- Because self sacrifice is a value that is part of who we are.
- Because love calls out to us across the troubled waters.
- That’s why we are here on Easter Morning.

THE SECOND GARDEN

Just beyond the Eastern Walls of Jerusalem there is a garden named “Gethsemane.” Everyone in Jerusalem knew this garden in the time of Jesus. The garden was a gathering place for Jesus and his disciples after celebrating Passover Dinner on Maundy Thursday. During Lent we have learned much from this olive grove with its olive press, nourished by wells with living water.

But there is another garden that is much more important than Gethsemane. I have saved the best for last. This second garden doesn’t really have a name of its own. It is to this second garden that Easter story leads us.

ACCORDING TO JOHN:

After Jesus died on the cross ... Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret disciple because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission.

So Joseph came and removed Jesus’ body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths. ... Now there was a garden near the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb -- a tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish Day of Preparation ... they laid Jesus there. In a new tomb, in a garden, and then they returned to their homes.

LUKE CONTINUES THE STORY.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the garden tomb.



They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, and when they entered the tomb they did not find the body of

the Lord Jesus.

And they were told that Jesus is not here; for he is risen.

THE GARDEN TOMB

In the 1920’s a garden that fits this description was discovered just north of the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. The Garden Tomb is believed by many to be the garden and sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea. The Garden is owned and administered by The Garden Tomb (Jerusalem) Association, a Charitable Trust based in the United Kingdom. Who has been to this garden that is just north of the Damascus Gate, near the bus stop?

If the Garden Tomb is not the place mentioned in our scripture, it still meets the description precisely. Flowers grow, trees provide shade, and stone benches provide a place to sit in front of the entry to the tomb. A large cistern collects water for the vegetation.

There is a door on the front of a tomb carved into the hillside. On the door there is a message carved in the wood that says, “He is not here – for he is risen.”

IT FEELS RIGHT

So if this is the tomb to which the body was taken, then it is also the site of the resurrection. If this is not the place, it FEELS LIKE the place where the story ends.

I find all this remarkable. The tomb isn't the final resting place of Jesus, the tomb is the place where Jesus was NOT buried. If the Garden Tomb is the place people go to seek Jesus, then this is the one place in all the world where we can be certain that he is not.

"Jesus Christ is risen today," we proclaim, because it is Easter morning. I have both received and served holy communion in this garden, using small wine goblets like the ones I gave you a couple of years ago when I returned from my most recent visit to the Holy Land.

JESUS WAS A SAILOR

Jesus was like a sailor who offered his life to his captors, in order to save his crew. In doing so, Jesus calls on his followers to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. He commissioned others to proclaim the good news: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matthew 10)

The story of what happened after the first Easter is the story of great lives, great challenges, great love, great adventures, great courage, great joy, great allegiance to a higher cause, and finally, great reward – lives that lasted long after death.

These are keys to eternal life, and they are all right there in the pages of scripture.

Love: Love your neighbor, love your God.

Love and romance are the most powerful feelings and emotions. History is filled with great men and great women who have thrown away everything in the course of love. I hope every one of you has had a powerful experience of love.

Outlast yourself. Jesus said, be part of something larger than your own life.

Courage will outlast our bodies, our adventures will bring us joy, and noble accomplishments will make us live on.

Learn that laughter brings longevity. Jesus' teachings were full of humor, irony, and the humility of laughter. Wisdom and learning are made possible by laughter. Humans laugh; they feel joy.

Laughter and irony have been the subjects of some of the greatest and most instructive books. Laughter is key to enjoying each normal day, and it is essential to getting through days of adversity and struggle.

Love God and Country. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. That noble emotion that leads one on to friendship, also leads us to patriotism. Patriotism has nothing to do with agreeing or disagreeing with one politician or another, or agreeing with the political party in power. Patriotism is far greater. It is loving God and country more than anything in it.

Remember that the Human Spirit cannot be conquered. It can only be surrendered. This is Jesus himself. Adversity happens to us all, but even if we surrender for a while, we cannot be conquered except by the denial of this spirit.

Progress to maturity with hope. When I was a child, I thought like a child, but I grew in wisdom, grace and understanding. Our Bible is not one frozen moment in time. It is the story of God's purpose worked out over the process of time, growth and maturity. This life prepares us for what is beyond.

So here we are at the final garden peering into eternity itself. I put a little checklist on the back of the bulletin to remind you of these six keys to eternal life.

- **Love:** Has your life been filled with love you have given? Then welcome to eternity.
- **Courage:** Have you committed yourself to things that will outlast your body, and dared to do important things, even if they are not easy things? Then welcome to eternity.
- **Laughter:** Have you laughed often, as you have loved boldly? Then welcome to eternity.
- **Patriotism:** Do you love God and country more than anything in that country and any creature comfort that you have carved out for yourself? Then welcome to eternity.
- **Unconquerable Spirit:** Has your spirit remained unconquered? Then welcome to eternity.
- **Growth:** And are you progressing from youth to maturity with hope at every stage? Then welcome to eternity.

SO HOW DOES IT END?

I wish that I could end by saying that the captain who put his life on the line for his crew was safely rescued. But as of this morning, I don't know how that story will end. However I know that this captain has already been brave and sacrificial. I know that it is the story that wraps up the themes of love, love of colleagues and country, faith and courage, and progress to maturity.



We will always be praying for a captain somewhere. If you are going to travel, be sure you have a good one.

ANOTHER CAPTAIN

But Walt Whitman immortalized a Captain like this, who gave his life for his crew and who did not survive. This poem is his tribute to Abraham Lincoln, and the ship he brought home safely was the United States through the conflict of the American Civil War. I'd like to read a portion of Whitman's poem as a tribute to Lincoln on his 200th birthday, as a tribute to captain Richard Philips, and as a theological reflection upon the unconquerable spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is proof that character can outlast our body, and good deeds of people live on in the lives of those who remember them:

O Captain My Captain
by Walt Whitman

O Captain my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

II

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up--for you the flag is flung for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

III

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

As I said, we already know if our captain is brave. He is brave.

We already know if he is willing to lay down his life so that others may live. He is willing.

Life or death will not be the final chapter of the captains for whom we pray this day. Life and death will just be part of the story, and we pray for life.

Acts of courage and heroism live on, no matter what the outcome.

Acts of love have a character of their own that transcends that which is loved.

Patriotism and courage are recognized even by our enemies.

God's children know that the human spirit cannot be conquered.

There are powerful lessons before us on Easter morning. Some of the lessons are yours. Some come from people who lived in other places and other times. Some come from the very Son of God.

And one lesson comes from a man now floating in a life raft on a part of the ocean that belongs to no one.

Let us honor them all when we say "Christ is Risen." To which the people answer: "Christ is Risen, indeed."

(FOOTNOTE: LATE SUNDAY MORNING, IT WAS LEARNED THAT CAPTAIN RICHARD PHILLIPS HAD BEEN FREED FROM HIS CAPTORS AND WAS SAFELY ABOARD A U. S. NAVY SHIP AFTER A RESCUE MISSION BY NAVY SEALS.)



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