

## **Easter Comes In Inches\***

**John 20:1-10; Acts 10:34-43**

**Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri**

**Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015**

**AUDIO: [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/easter-comes-in-inches/](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/easter-comes-in-inches/)**

Years ago, I was visiting a man in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit. He was hooked up to tubes and couldn't talk, though fully conscious. He was determined not to give up. He took a pen and clip board and wrote, "Hard by the yard, but a cinch by the inch." I've never forgotten that. Sometimes, we can't do something big, but we can do something small. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus was an epic event. Yes, experiencing the Risen Christ in our lives is a game-changer. But sometimes we have unrealistic expectations about how that plays out in real life, daily. Resurrection power is sometimes gradual and almost imperceptible. Easter comes by inches, not always in miles or even yards. Inches. Baby steps.

Let me show you what I mean. Here in Acts 10, we hear an early Easter sermon preached by Simon Peter. You remember him, right? The one who messed up. Who was always getting it wrong. Speaking when he should have been listening. And when he did get something right (Matthew 16), he would undo it all by saying too much (Peter, just quit talking!). He would brag about how he had it made spiritually. And then he denied Jesus during our Savior's trial. And yet, here he is, preaching the Good News. He went on to a life of a faithful apostle and the leader in the early church. And even then, he messed up. The very sermon I read from Acts 10 is Peter's admission that he had been too limited in his view of God's love. "Now I see God loves everyone," he declares (v. 34). So Easter came to him in inches. How many of you are glad God doesn't give up on us? How many of you are glad that God doesn't just see what we are but what we are becoming, that even though Easter only comes in inches, at least it comes?

I heard a man tell about stopping at a gift shop somewhere in the South. He said to a friend who was with him, "Boy this wood-carved hound dog seems really overpriced. His friend replied, "It's really pretty simple to make. You just start with a block of wood and then take away everything that doesn't look like a hound dog." That's how we grow in Christ. Over time (not all at once), God takes away everything that does not look like Jesus. Easter comes in inches.

Have you ever experienced that? Little doses of courage when we need it most. A change inside you. A decision to forgive. A new love for your spouse. A fresh commitment to get to know your enemy rather than gossip about her. You see some injustice in the community and you get involved. Before you know it, some wrong has been made right. God's world has been turned right side up. Where did that come from? Or suddenly you get the desire to do some act of service and you don't want anyone else to know about it. New energy, fresh desire. Easter! Little doses, small steps, inches.

We're hungry for something more than religion, aren't we? We're hungry for authentic relationship with God. Dr. Kent Brantly, a medical missionary, had been infected with Ebola and confined to an isolation unit. When he was released last August and declared cured, Brantly said, "I am thrilled to be alive." Pretty amazing, what we take for granted. To be alive! Easter Sunday...we are alive. Isn't this the parable for those of us who know Jesus? We were carrying around the sentence of death, living in isolation. And then Jesus happens. Easter!

I want you to know whoever you are this morning, you don't have to live in isolation from God and others. You don't have to carry around a death sentence. There is hope for you. Because God loves you and Christ died for you. We may know God's love and saving help by simple trust, not earning it. We admit we are sinners in need of forgiveness. We trust in Jesus and what he has done for us. We then experience joy, forgiveness, new power and eternal hope. And Jesus, your best friend, the Risen One, accompanies you through everything in life, an inch at a time, and then accompanies you safely through death to the other side. And then you say with joy, "I'm thrilled to be alive!" Amen!

\*I am indebted to Rev. Heidi Neumark for this sermon title. See "Resurrection by inches" *Christian Century*, May 14, 2014, p. 13.