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Why? – Matthew 28:1-10

The whole of this book, the Bible, is the story of Easter. No, I won't read it all to you – but I hope you've been reading and studying it yourselves, because that's just what it is: the story of why Easter had to be, what it is, and what it means for us.

The central focus of Easter is Jesus' resurrection. This has been a stumbling block for millions over the millennia; it may be for you. But an even deeper question is, why? Why did any of this have to happen?

Any discussion of why has to include this one word: *redemption*.

What does that mean? It's classic Christian jargon, thrown around all over the place in all sorts of circumstances; but what do we mean by that, *redemption*?

I remember a pastor once who was trying to define worship. All he could say was that it was "in Spirit and in truth" - quoting Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well. But that's as far as he could go: no matter what you asked or how you asked it, that was his response.

That's true of redemption. Too many times, we've used words like "redemption" because they seem to fit the context, but we don't know

what they're supposed to mean. So here goes: redemption is the act of redeeming. And redeeming is getting something back that you've given over to someone else's use, and returning what was given to you as, well, ransom, or surety, or deposit against its safe return.

Confused now? Well, think of pop bottles. Remember when they were worth something - in my day, two cents? Now, I don't mean today, when you get money back for recycling. This is back when you may have gathered up a bunch of bottles and turned them in for a quarter to buy too much candy.

Back then, what was happening was that the bottling company was retaining ownership of the bottle, and you gave them two cents or whatever in case you didn't turn the bottle back in. Redeem it. The company was happy for you to enjoy the contents, but they wanted the bottle back, so people (most, anyway) returned the bottles, and got their own two cents back. They *redeemed* them.

Now, in the beginning of the Bible, we find a story about the first man and the first woman. They are used as a way to explain why the perfection of creation fell apart, the origin of sin.

Most of the time, I hear this sin explained as disobedience: the pair of them doing the one thing they were specifically told not to do, eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But we've missed something and trivialized the weight of this story if that's all we hear. Their true error – the origin of sin – was not so much that they did

something they were told not to do: it was that they made the intellectual leap that the fruit *belonged to them*.

Do you see the difference? They themselves were not their own: they were God's creation, and belonged to God. God gave them – gave us – life, and that life was not theirs, and is not ours: it belongs to God. In fact, nothing we call our own is truly ours – it's given for a time. Given for our use, not to keep – that's why you can't take your car with you after you die. You can have it put in the grave with you, but it won't join you!

Once they'd made the leap that the fruit was theirs, it's a very short trip to thinking their lives belonged to themselves, that everything was theirs.

Now, this life we've been given is a lot like one of those old soda bottles: the container, life itself, always belongs to God. The contents – our living – is there for us to enjoy, but we must return that container – life - to God, the rightful owner, who very much wants it back.

The problem is, we treat the container of life as if it were ours to use as we choose, any way we like. And that leads to doing things, no matter how good you are, that continue to commit that original sin of assuming ownership. Some of us – like when we were rebellious and wanted to show how little we needed two cents and threw away the pop bottle – just throw our container, our lives, away – sometimes with great thought, sometimes completely carelessly. We mistreat what Jesus and

Paul called God's true temple, our bodies, our lives, as something we can use or misuse as we choose.

And only God, as the owner, has the power of redemption. We don't. Here's a little proverb for you: *You can work yourself to death, but you cannot work yourself to life.*

Because of this sin, that we have convinced ourselves to think of our lives and our possessions as our own, only God has the power to redeem us. We cannot work hard enough or well enough to earn our lives.

And so comes Jesus, the Son of God. Scripture is full of references to what God will have to do to redeem humanity, and with it all creation – because by assuming we own our lives, we have also sullied creation itself by assuming it, too, belongs to us. We have dragged it down with us.

I have no idea why God chose this particular planet out of a whole universe, or human beings out of all the life God created to do this work of redemption, but that's what seems to have happened.

In any case, we are in God's debt, we are using his life as ours. We get further into debt by abusing life. And to get those lives – our lives - back took all of God's power. In Jesus. "Upon him was the punishment that made us whole [redeemed us], and by his stripes [his wounds and death] we are healed." Why did this have to happen? Simply this: words you've heard before but may hear slightly differently

now – “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way.”

We have assumed that this world, our things, our very lives are our own. They are not; as Paul tells us, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price” [1 Cor 6: 19-20a] – and the price was something you know about but which is very hard to take in: the life of God made flesh and blood, Jesus. And his resurrection, his rising from the dead as God once again in flesh and blood conquered the hold that death had on our lives, in our sins that led from the sin of thinking we are our own.

So, what’s this mean to you and me this Easter? Once again, we get to hear that our lives belong to God, which is very good news if you consider the alternative. Which leads me to two final points for you to walk out of this church today and put into practice: one, believe. In believing, your life is redeemed, so live your life like you’ve got to return it.

And two? Well, the old pop bottlers were happy for you to enjoy what they put in their bottle, weren’t they? God wants you to enjoy every possible moment of this life he’s given you for a time, until we transition to our eternal life with God. Rejoice, give thanks, and praise God who has blessed us with all this beauty! Make the most out of it!