

LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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COFFIN CONFUSION
John 19:38-42 & 20:1-18
EASTER SUNDAY

You've all heard the expression "*I wouldn't be caught dead in that.*" Let me ask you kind of a weird question on this Easter Sunday morning: What **WOULD** you be caught dead in?

According to John's gospel ... Jesus was *caught dead* wearing a linen cloth, and earlier, a crown of thorns. The place picked for his final resting place was a cave on the property of Joseph of Arimathea.

Yet, on that first Easter morning, it appears that the linen cloth has been shed. *The TOMB echoes with emptiness* ... as if Jesus had in effect told his disciples: "*I wouldn't be caught dead in that!*" "*I wouldn't be caught dead in that ... TOMB!*"

Still the question for us: What **WOULD you be caught dead in?**



We wouldn't be *caught dead* in a *leisure suit* or with a *beehive hairdo*. In a *Nehru jacket* and *bell-bottoms* [although bell-bottoms, as of late, seem to be making a comeback.] My guess is that anyone born during the Reagan presidency would *not be caught dead* wearing anything remotely connected to the 80s ... *the Disco Era*.

And those of us who still know all the lyrics to Bob Dylan's "*Blowing in the Wind*" ... today would *not be caught dead* in *blue jean bell-bottoms*, *paisley shirts* and *love beads in our hair*. I've got some pictures of myself from the 70s that are really scary. Try to imagine me with long hair out to here, dark glasses, bell-bottoms and beads in my hair. *Like I said ... kind of scary.*

What **WOULD you be caught dead in?**

I'm fairly certain we won't see Grandpa wearing *cargo pants* that are sagging at the rear by a thread and a prayer, showing off his *plaid boxers*. Although the *blue tint* in Grandma's hair just might match perfectly the mop on her 16-year-old great-granddaughter's (or grandson's) head.



IMAGE IS REALITY.

That's why we groom it so carefully. Knowing this, the *Whitelight Casket Company* of Dallas, Texas can now help us make a final statement that expresses our personality for all eternity!

Whitelight has introduced the "*Art Casket*" for those of us who **WANT** to be *caught dead* in something *unique*. The discriminating consumer of the 21st century now has other options. I don't have to be laid to rest in either a traditional wooden box OR a boring bronze coffin. **NO.** *Whitelight Casket Company* can assist me and my loved ones in selecting a casket that not only houses my body after death, but it also serves as [this is a direct quote] "*an epilogue echoing the richness of a life fulfilled. Whether bold and vivid, or soft and subdued, our coffins are as unforgettable as the life they commemorate.*"

This is NOT a joke, folks.

They even have a web page: www.artcaskets.com. Check it out!

The owners of *Whitelight* figure that people today want everything tailored specifically to their personal sense of style. What is your “personal sense of style”? I’m not sure I can define mine. One of the owners of *Whitelight* explains it this way:

“My generation craves choice and personal expression. That’s what this is ... your final statement. If you’re going to buy a casket anyway, why buy a *blank*? No one’s life was a *blank*.”

If you are a golfer, you might choose the “*Fairway to Heaven*” model. *Whitelight* states: “*There’s no better way to celebrate the life of a golf enthusiast than with an Art Casket that captures the magic of the early morning light on a breathtaking fairway.*”

Oh yeah, there’s the “*The Last Ride*.” “*This Art Casket captures the spirit of a wide-open throttle on Route 66. It’s the perfect way to honor those touring enthusiasts who prefer wind in their hair, handlebars, and a dashed white line stretching into infinity.*”

I especially like “*The Race is Over*” model. “*This high performance Art Casket places the auto racing fan in the driver’s seat for one last lap. Cool caskets for cool people.*”

Hey, I am NOT making this stuff up. Go to the Website if you don’t believe me.

Other popular Art Caskets include depictions of *da Vinci’s The Last Supper*, the national flag of Ireland, a beach scene, a mountain lake, a view of the New York skyline and of course the company’s personal favorite: the Lone Star complete with “*The Long Horn, The Alamo, the mesas, cactus, Bluebonnets and of course the state flag that is so big ... only the Texas skies could hold it.*”

And, finally, my person favorite, the “*Return to Sender*” model. It looks like a giant postal package and touts: “*You’re packed for the trip home in this ‘Express Delivery’ parcel.*” It’s got this huge red stamp on the top: “*Return to Sender.*”

Two hundred of these Art Caskets were sold in only the first six months of operation. And the *Whitelight Casket Company*, with their *new spring line* available this month, is confident that more and more people will *choose to be caught dead in a personalized Art Casket*.



Individualized coffins ... the latest thing in satisfying today’s desire for a more personalized funeral. It’s *not* really a new idea though, you know? Personalized “*Final statements*” were being made hundreds and hundreds of years before the *Whitelight Casket Company* even existed.

The ancient Egyptians were masters of this practice centuries before the birth of Jesus. *Tomb prep* began long before a person’s death in the land of the Pharaohs. Artisans and craftsmen were employed to turn a coffin into a final statement about *who* was inside it and *what* that deceased person had accomplished in his or her life.

A king’s sarcophagus would be carved to resemble his likeness and housed in a replica of his palace, reminding *mortals* and *immortals* alike that he had been a person of great power.

A noblewoman might rest in a coffin painted in black, with gold images *detailing* the life *she led* and the life she *could expect to lead* in eternity.

The 16-year-old King Tut, was *not* a particularly important ruler. But his 3,500-year-old tomb and coffin, found intact in 1922, to this day testifies to his family’s wealth and love for him. The coffin is decorated with precious stones, gold, and glass ... *making an impressive final statement*.

For the ancient Egyptians, much like the customers of *Whitelight*, a coffin was not merely a simple, rectangular box. It was a symbol of one’s *personality* and *uniqueness*. *It told a story.*



While the ancient Egyptians selected personal items, from hair pins to game pieces, to be included inside the coffin in *preparation for meeting the gods ... it seems they were just as confused about the particulars of eternity as we are today.*

Reincarnation.

Being at one with the Universe.

The different religions of the world.

Where will I go?

What's it going to be like?

What are my dead loved ones experiencing right now?

It's ALL so confusing!

★ ***AND THEN, into all this Coffin Confusion, Easter morning injects a single core conviction:***

The tomb is EMPTY. BARREN, BLANK and BARE.



It's this UNEXPECTEDLY empty tomb that is God's final statement to a questioning world.

But what does it mean?

People today aren't interested in blank caskets, so it's hard to see the significance of a tomb that is "*echoing with emptiness.*"

There was *nothing* in Jesus' burial or gravesite to indicate that he lived a unique life...

- ➔ No *cave drawings* told his story.
- ➔ No *painted coffin* offered last words or images to convey the teachings or the healings.
- ➔ No *golden trinkets* were buried with him to indicate his royal lineage or his divine power.

Jesus was placed in a fresh cave in a garden. A large rock sealed the opening. His grave and entombment were *common* for that day and *ordinary*. *At least it seemed to be ordinary.*

But looking back, there are *clues* lying around the empty tomb that indicate that *this* was actually an *AWESOME individual* with the most *UNCOMMON of lives.*

There is even evidence that *HIS death* was an *INSPIRED event ...* ultimately carried out in some *supernatural design.*



LET'S LOOK AT THE SETTING: A garden.

The death of Jesus had begun in one *Garden [the Garden of Gethsemane]* and it ended in another *Garden*. Mary thought that Jesus was a Gardener when he first spoke to her outside the tomb. Our son, Jeremy, when he was little called cemeteries, *Grave Gardens*. In a garden dead seeds are buried and then they spring to life. *Was this Garden Tomb some sort of statement about NEW LIFE?*



AND CONSIDER THE CHARACTERS.

The gospel of John tells us that it was Nicodemus who brought the spices to anoint Jesus' body. Nicodemus was the Pharisee we meet earlier in John's gospel when he came to Jesus one night, *aching* to figure out *who this guy was*, only to have Jesus tell him he had to be "*born anew*" if he had any hopes of seeing God's kingdom.

And now, Nicodemus has come to Jesus on another night, the night of Jesus' death. Was the reappearance of Nicodemus some sort of statement that someone was, indeed, about to be "BORN ANEW?"

In all of the *confusion* of Easter morning, and perhaps in the midst of our OWN STRESS and CONFUSION, God has made a final statement ... the ultimate statement ... that *trumps ANYTHING* you or I might say or believe.

★ **THE TOMB WAS EMPTY.**

Upon this they ALL agree!

- ➔ The *women*.
- ➔ The *disciples*.
- ➔ The *authorities*.
- ➔ The *scholars*.
- ➔ The *skeptics*.

All agree that Jesus would NOT be CAUGHT DEAD in that cave!

THE TOMB ECHOES WITH EMPTINESS!

★ Easter is the reality that *challenges us* to embark on a search for Jesus. To set out on a *journey of faith* that can include being CAUGHT ALIVE by the Risen Christ.

★ If we join Mary in *waiting* and *wondering* outside the tomb ... we can literally join millions in the experience of *having Jesus call us by name* and *leading* us into a whole NEW way of LIVING ... a whole new way of LOVING and finally BEING all that we were meant to BE ... with the promise of all this existing beyond *any lasting grasp of death*.

Jesus would NOT BE CAUGHT DEAD in that tomb. Jesus prefers being CAUGHT ALIVE outside the tomb ... SEEN in the garden, along the road to Emmaus, and SEEN in the FACES of people who have EXPERIENCED RESURRECTION and KNOW IT COMES FROM GOD.

JESUS ... CAUGHT ALIVE ... IN YOU!



This is the *real question* after all. NOT ... "What *wouldn't* you be caught dead in?" ... but **WHAT would you be CAUGHT ALIVE in?**

CAUGHT ALIVE in a life filled with purpose?

CAUGHT ALIVE in a forgiven life, and in knowing forgiveness freely offering it to others?

CAUGHT ALIVE in a life that knows *unbounded love*?

CAUGHT ALIVE in a *fresh start* at life and seeking to help others find that same *fresh start* in Christ?



HERE'S THE POINT: If you're NOT CAUGHT ALIVE, you'll be CAUGHT DEAD. And NO ONE – least of all Jesus, who DIED FOR US and is RISEN – wants that.

HAPPY EASTER!

Amen and Amen.