



The First United Methodist Church of LaGrange

Easter Sunday
April 4, 2021 • 8:30 and 11:00 am

Good Morning! Welcome to First Methodist!

CHRIST IS RISEN! THE LORD IS RISEN, INDEED! ALLELUIA!

"Risen" (Sony Pictures, 2016) tells the story of Clavius, a Roman tribune in Jerusalem, whom Pontius Pilate tasks with finding the missing body of the crucified Jesus.

Refreshingly, *"Risen"* doesn't set up a contrast between faith and doubt. Only someone with enough faith to care about the truth is capable of doubt. Pilate is the villain of the film because he is simply not concerned about the evidence of the Resurrection or the truth of Christianity. All he cares about is power. Confronted with evidence of the resurrection, Pilate nonchalantly replies, *"Then I'll kill him again."*

Clavius is the hero of the film because he is a seeker. Caiaphas, the High Priest, pays the tomb's guards to lie and say that the disciples stole the body (cf. Matthew 28:11–15). Clavius, however, knows it is a lie. He wants to know the truth. Clavius is dissatisfied with his life. He believes there has to be more to life. But when he interviews Mary Magdalene about her claim to have seen the risen Jesus, she intriguingly tells him, *"You're looking for the wrong thing."*

Clavius sees the world in military terms. For Clavius, even religion is a political struggle between the Roman god Mars and the Hebrew God. Clavius, however, longs to escape from the cycle of violence.

Jesus has a very different idea about peace and power. From an apologetics point of view, it is interesting that seeing the risen Jesus does not resolve all of Clavius' questions or result in his immediate conversion. *"Risen"* rightly recognizes that the fact of a risen Jesus would not by itself answer all our questions. It would not necessarily prove the divinity of Christ or even the truth of Christ's teachings.

In the film, Peter admits to Clavius that he "doesn't have all the answers." Even the objective truth of Christ's resurrection leaves open the subjective questions of "What does Christ's resurrection mean for me?" and "How should I respond to Christ? Would being an eyewitness of the Resurrection be enough? What is the skeptic truly seeking?"

These are the questions that *"Risen"* has Jesus Himself pose to Clavius just before the Ascension. *"What will it take to convince you?"* Jesus asks. *"With your own eyes you have seen, and yet you still doubt? What frightens you?"* Clavius replies, *"Being wrong."* Jesus knows that Clavius seeks inner peace, not mere intellectual certainty.

Clavius needs his mind lifted up to higher things (Colossians 3:2). The first witness Clavius interviews is an old blind woman who says Jesus *"loved me. He lifted me up."* It is as if she, like Jesus, has "risen." Clavius, too, needs to be lifted up and made to hope for something more than military power and worldly peace. Clavius needs to be transformed through the renewing of his mind (Romans 12:2). He needs to have a new understanding of power (1 Corinthians 1:18–25) and a new understanding of peace (Philippians 4:7). This transformation does not happen immediately for Clavius. Simply seeing the risen Jesus does not instantaneously change his worldview. Instead, his way of thinking begins to change gradually as he walks to Galilee with the disciples.

It is significant that Clavius was not converted by historical evidence. His conversion was a slow process that began by spending time with the disciples, by eating with them, seeing how they welcomed him even though he had persecuted them, and seeing how love had changed their lives.

Clavius' story reminds us that our lives themselves are the most effective witness for the Risen Lord. **The most convincing argument for the truth of Christian faith is how we love one another** (John 13:34–35)!

Remember how much I love you ...

It's an honor to be your Senior Minister this Easter!


Dr. John Beyers

We're Better Together!