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Easter Sunrise Sermon presented at Peach Mountain

COUNT YOUR SURPRISES

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~ Scripture: Luke 24:1-8 ~

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

One of the prevailing emotions on the first Easter morning must have been SURPRISE.

A surprise is when something not expected happens or comes along. It can be "pleasant" (nice) or "unpleasant".

Certainly all the key players in the Easter sunrise story were shocked and surprised. Nobody was expecting the tomb to be empty. Each registered their own response:

a) The women were "alarmed" when they found the stone rolled away; they were "afraid but filled with joy". [**Mark 16:5; Matthew 28:8**]

b) The guards "shook with fear and became like dead men". [**Matthew 28:4**]

c) The women told the 11 and others, who did not believe the women (it "seemed like nonsense"). [**Luke 24:9-11**]

d) Except Peter who was overcome with curiosity and went to see for himself [**Luke 24:12**]

Each had their own way of handling the news. But all were surprised and stunned.

EASTER is God saying "Surprise"! You didn't think I meant what I said.

You didn't think I/we (My Father and I) could pull it off.

No one can surprise us quite like God:

- First, He makes a surprise entrance into the world (i.e.: Nativity);
- Now this astonishing climax to His time on earth.

Surprises are woven all throughout life. To surprise is “to catch someone unaware”:

- You can give a surprise gift, a surprise party, a surprise visit.
- You can take your sweetheart on a surprise date (e.g.: like when I took Marcie to the Purple Rose Theatre).
- There can be an element of surprise in games and sports (e.g.: a certain move or play you weren't expecting);
- There's a military surprise (e.g.: an *ambush*), which occurs when a military unit strikes an enemy that is unprepared.
- In political circles, there's the October Surprise, referring to a national or international “happening” right before a presidential election that effects the outcome.

Surprises! When the unexpected happens!
God cannot be outdone when it comes to surprises.
He took everybody by surprise with the Empty Tomb.
He continues to surprise us, to catch us unaware.

I like to think of it as a **game of Hide-n-Seek** God plays with us. Remember how fun that game was as a child? How fun to “catch” the person hiding? Even though it seems like God is “hiding” at times, He just loves to get “caught” blessing His children.

If you were to string together the high points of my life, they would line up as a series of surprises—happy & not-so-happy—from the hand of a very loving and gracious God. I remember when:

- God made me a Christian. I grew up in the church. . .went to Sunday School from an early age. But when I was 13 years old, Jesus broke into my life, claimed me as His own and started changing me from the inside out.
- I first heard a called to ministry at age 16. What a blessing and honor that He wanted to use me!
- Some “unpleasant surprises” have come (i.e.: when things didn't turn out the way I expected), but “*in all things God has always worked for the good*” [**Romans 8:28**].
- I've been amazed at how God has provided during times when things were difficult. . . how He brought Marcie into my life. . .how He led me to ministry here at DUMC.
- God engineered another happy surprise this past Christmastime when our house sold.

There is great wisdom in the old Sunday School song Count Your Blessings. I wonder if we shouldn't add a new verse: “*Count Your Surprises. . .name them one-by-one. . .see what God has done*” . . .

And will continue to do to the very end—however that comes, whenever it comes. What then? I don't know, but I know what He has promised in **I Corinthians 2:9** that “*Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor the mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*”

We serve a God of wonderfully happy surprises—as this Easter story plainly declares. Let's keep looking for them. . .and try to catch God at His own game of *HIDE-N-SEEK*. Expect to be blown away! Expect the unexpected! You won't be disappointed!