Easter 2016
Luke 24:1-12
"S   T   R   E T CH"
Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

A very happy and joyous Easter to each of you! We're
happy to welcome our guests and visitors, our church
members, our family members and relatives, and whoever
you are! We're glad you're here today at Hope.

Now, I assume you all know that this is a Lutheran church.
Not all of you are Lutherans, I know; and not everybody here
knows what it means to be Lutheran … even some of the
Lutherans! So let me start off today by giving you a brief
description of what we Lutherans believe, with a little help
from Garrison Keillor, the National Public Radio humorist.
He lives up there in Minnesota, where there are tons of
Lutherans, and Garrison Keillor says here's what Lutherans
believe.

- Lutherans believe in usually following the official
  liturgy and feel it is their way of suffering for their sins.
- Lutherans believe their pastors will visit them in the
  hospital even if they don't notify them that they are
  there.
- Lutherans believe the Bible forbids them from
  crossing the aisle when "sharing the peace."
- Lutherans believe that when you hear something
  really funny during the sermon you should smile as
  loudly as you can.
- Lutherans believe that when you watch a "Star Wars"
  movie and they say, "May the Force be with you," you
  respond, "And also with you."

That's what Lutherans believe! Actually, there's a whole
bunch of other more serious things, as well – doctrines and
dogmas and teachings that make up our belief system – and

1

we Lutherans have a reputation for hanging on fiercely to our well-defined set of beliefs.

But every once in a while, God just demolishes our well-thought-out belief structures. Easter is one of those times.

It certainly was for old St. Peter. On that first Easter Sunday, Peter stumbled into something that messed up his beliefs.

A group of women came running up to him and the other disciples of Jesus, reporting something crazy. The women claimed they had been at the tomb of Jesus, where a couple of angels told them that Jesus was alive. Peter shook his head in disbelief. He knew for a fact that Jesus was dead as a doornail. Everything Peter knew about life and death, about breathing and heartbeats, told him it simply wasn't possible for "Dead Jesus" to be "Alive Jesus."

Even though Jesus himself, in the weeks before, had spoken to the disciples directly about this – that he would go to Jerusalem and be killed, and that he would rise again on the third day. Still, it all sounded too good to be true! Peter and the other male disciples hesitated. They held back. They didn't – couldn't -- believe it.

Peter even went to the tomb himself, found it empty, and saw the empty grave clothes … and still he wondered to himself what had happened.

What was Peter's problem? Why did he have such a hard time believing the exact thing that Jesus had told him would happen?

Some of you (Lutheran) women out there are saying to yourselves, "I'm not surprised! Typical men! Not listening! Not paying attention!"

I heard about a couple attending a marriage enrichment seminar. The husband was a little bit reluctant, but he was trying his best. They were in a session on communication with some other couples, and the leader was stressing the importance of listening. "Husbands," the leader said, "Let's see how well you've been paying attention to your wives through the years. See if you can name your wife's favorite flower." So the husband – who was really trying -- turned to his wife, looked into her eyes, smiled lovingly, patted her gently on the arm, and said, "It's Pillsbury, isn't it?"

The funeral service was held last week (in a Lutheran church).

Was that Peter's problem? Did he just have a hard time listening, when he heard the message of Easter? Maybe. The Bible does mention, after all, that he was married. But Peter's real problem was his belief system.

Whether we're men or women, girls or boys, Lutherans or non-Lutherans, we all tend to believe that we know what's possible, and what's not possible. Peter couldn't see beyond the boundaries of what he believed could happen to a "Dead Jesus." So when he heard about the resurrection, he thought it was to good to be true.

But it *was* true! Jesus was alive! The power of God is stronger than death, mightier than the devil, and *nothing* is impossible with God!

Easter bulldozed Peter's belief system, and I think Easter challenges our belief system, too – not as Lutherans, but as humans. Easter calls us all to a new way of living, a new way of thinking, a new way of believing what's possible *for God to do* in our lives*.*

On Easter we all have to stretch our imaginations a little bit. We all have to stretch our reality a little bit. Is God calling you to do something, or believe something, today? Something you may think is impossible?

What if God were somehow saying to you today, "Hey, you know I love you, but I really want this one part of your life to change and get better, and I'm going to help you do it"? Is that possible?

Imagine God sends you a note today that reads, "I know you're eating Easter dinner with your family, and there's that one relative that you have a hard time being nice to; but today's the day. I want you to be nice to her, all day; and I will give you the love of Jesus in your heart to help you do it." Is that possible?

What if God gives you a nudge, and tells you, "I'd like for you to share your faith with that person over there, and I promise to help you through it"? Would that even be possible?

Or God tells you, "I'm forgiving you all of your sins because Jesus died for you. I'm even forgiving you that really big one in your past that you still feel guilty about; and I want you to finally forgive yourself now, too." Is that possible?

When God's involved, anything's possible? If God is leading you, if God's calling you, if God is speaking to your life in some way, anything is possible!

Peter's belief system got seriously stretched on Easter Day. Now it's your turn, to find out what's really possible between you and God. Happy Easter! Amen.