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Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

“DAZED OR AMAZED!?”

One Sunday a man showed up at church with his ears painfully blistered. After the service, his concerned pastor asked "What in the world happened to your ears?" The man said, "I was lying on the couch yesterday afternoon watching a ball game on TV and my wife was ironing nearby. I was totally engrossed in the game when she left the room, leaving the iron near the phone. The phone rang and keeping my eyes glued to the television, I grabbed the hot iron and put it to my ear." "So how did the other ear get burned?" the pastor asked. "Well, I had no more than hung up and the guy called again."

Now there is a man who was focused. He was so caught up in watching the game, that he didn't know what he was doing. In our lesson for today the disciples of Jesus have lost their focus. They were still focused on Jesus' death. They are confused and tired. They need a break. They have been through a lot. They had seen their Master crucified on a cross. It was the lowest point in their lives. They had invested everything they had in following him, including three years of their lives. When they saw him nailed between two thieves, it was as if everything they had worked for was futile and without meaning. No one could know their pain and disillusionment.

Then the women had gone to the tomb on the first day of the week and found the stone rolled away and the body gone. They discovered that their Master was alive. They heard the words, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Now each of them had seen him with their own eyes. Still, it was a bit too much for them to deal with mentally and emotionally. They wanted to believe, but it was like they were in a dream. It was too much, too soon. Once people die - they're suppose to remain dead! It says the apostles were amazed but sometimes I think they were simply dazed! How would we react in that situation? We hear the Easter story year-after-year to the point where it becomes so common that we can't relate to it's significance anymore. Maybe because it happened so long ago.

There is a story a bit more recent that might help us gain perspective as to what the disciples were feeling. There is a supposedly true account, of a judge in Yugoslavia who was electrocuted when he reached up to turn on the light while standing in the bathtub. His wife found his body sprawled on the bathroom floor. He was pronounced dead and was placed in a room under a crypt in the town cemetery for twenty-four hours before burial. However, in the middle of the night, the judge came to, realized where he was, and rushed over to alert the guard that he was alive! Startled, the guard promptly ran off, terrified. Fortunately for the judge, the guard returned with a friend, and they released the newly-revived judge.

The judge's first thought was to phone his wife and reassure her that he was alive. He got

no farther than, "Honey...it's me," when, startled, his wife screamed and fainted. So, the judge then went to the houses of several friends; they were all startled and was sure he was a ghost. In a last desperate measure, he contacted a friend in another city who had not heard of his death. This person, this witness, was able to convince his family and friends that the judge was truly not dead but alive. Literally raised from the dead.

Can you imagine how the guard felt when the body started yelling? Or the judge's wife and friends? Can it really be true? Unless something happens to you, it's difficult to describe. It's similar to the story many of you may have heard, or even seen the movie based on the story called: "It Could Happen to You" about a New York cop named Charley who was having coffee in a little diner. When he was finished, he reaches into his pocket to pay and to leave a tip, but finds that he has just enough money to pay for the coffee. There's not enough to tip the waitress. Embarrassed, he offers the waitress a choice. He promises to return the next day with double the usual tip. Or, taking a lottery ticket out of his billfold and holding it up, he promises to split the winnings, if any, of the lottery ticket he just purchased for that evening's drawing.

Now, Yvonne didn't need to hear that. She has had a bad enough day without losing a tip. In fact, her life was the pits. She hates her job as a waitress. Her runaway husband has run up her MasterCard balance so high, that just that afternoon she had been in court to declare personal bankruptcy. Could things get worse? Still, she is good natured about it. She smiles helplessly at her bad luck, forfeits Charley's promise of tomorrow's pocket change, and jokingly takes Charlie up on his offer of half the lottery ticket's potential winnings.

Now I wouldn't be telling this story, except the ticket beats the incredible odds, and wins \$4 million. And staying true to his word, Charley comes to the diner the next morning to give Yvonne the good news. Her tip for serving a cup of coffee is not a mere two bits, but \$2 million. Well, you can imagine Yvonne's reaction to this good news. At first, utter disbelief covers Yvonne's face. She is dazed! "No. No. Why are you doing this to me? Is this some sort of cruel joke? No. It couldn't happen." Then, as Charley insists he is not joking, a tiny flicker of hope registers deep inside Yvonne. Now she's amazed! She dared just for a moment to believe that Charley's good news was true." "Yes? Yes?" she asks with her eyes widening." Can it really be true?" But disbelief wedges its way back into Yvonne's mind. She had, after all, only yesterday accepted her fate. Bankruptcy. "No! No!" she says, shaking herself back to reality. Her emotions are a slowly congealing mix of disbelief and belief - of being Dazed and then Amazed. But facts are facts. Charley's gift was really, genuinely hers. So, ultimately, as spectators we know that her joy will demolish her doubts. Yvonne's glimmer of belief grew stronger as Charley's smile and excitement gradually thawed her skepticism. He took her from being Dazed - to being AMAZED!!!

The women at the tomb and the disciples were experiencing the same thing. They heard the news that Christ Is ALIVE! They just couldn't believe it. This sort of thing doesn't happen! They were dazed! But as they saw the grave-clothes, heard the message of the Angels at the tomb, and Mary saw Jesus who she at first thought was the gardener, after all these things happened and all of these people saw him alive, they went from being dazed - to being amazed!

We are Easter Christians! We live on this side of the Resurrection. We heard the story. We know the good news. We should be AMAZED! But more often than not, Christians act as though they are dazed instead of Amazed, they have the “Deer-in-the-headlights” look.

Death changes people! I was 14 years old when my father died. It was on a Saturday. On Sunday I went to Church. I needed to be in Church on that Sunday more than any other Sunday. My Father died. It was a sudden Heart Attack, and I was Dazed! I remember asking myself, “Okay. You’ve heard the story of the Resurrection and the promise of Eternal Life. Do you really believe it or not?!” That was the moment I went from being dazed to being amazed! The Easter message is what made it possible for me to face Death!

I have had to stand in this pulpit at numerous funerals. I’ve done funerals of your parent, your spouse, your child, your friend, and people have often asked me, “Pastor, how can you do that?” It is this Easter Message that makes it possible for me to face Death. We should no longer be dazed by Death. Instead, we are amazed by the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come!

We are no longer living a deer-in-the-headlights kind of life. We are living the life as Children of God who have the promise of Eternal Life! The message of Easter is loud and clear! Christ *IS*Risen!
He Is Risen Indeed! That is truly AMAZING!!!! Amen!