

In 1973, the classic rock group, Kansas, had a life changing experience. They had been based out of Topeka, and they had been touring around the region by van, playing small clubs. But in 1973 they were discovered and signed by a national record company. They made a trip to New York City to record their first album. And then they went back home.

And for various reasons, Kirshner Records sat on the album for almost a whole year without releasing it. So the band was in limbo.

The members of Kansas didn't know that they were about to experience a huge change. In 1974 their album would be released, and it would eventually be a gold record. They would go from playing mid-west clubs to touring the country and opening in big theaters for bands like Queen. They would release two more records in 1975 that would also eventually go gold. Then in 1976 they would record an album that would be a game-changer. It would go quintuple-platinum, and peak at #5 on the charts. It would have a hit song, "Carry on Wayward Son," that would go to #11 on the charts. Kansas would then go from being an opening act to being the headliner in the biggest arenas in the country, places like Madison Square Garden. Some 20 years later, "Carry on Wayward Son" would be the most often played song on classic rock radio.<sup>1</sup> But in 1973, that was all still in the hazy unknown future.

In 1973, Kansas had already recorded their first album. But then they found themselves back home in a state of limbo, not knowing what the future would bring, not knowing if Kirshner would even release their album. And so they got back to travelling by van and tried to eke out a living playing the regional clubs around Topeka.

In John's Gospel, Jesus followers also find themselves in a state of limbo. John chapters 20 and 21 detail their experiences. We just heard the first half of John 20 as our Gospel lesson this morning. We heard about 3 disciples encountering the empty tomb on Easter morning: Mary Magdalene, and Peter, and John.

Mary gets to the tomb before sunrise. She sees that the stone is rolled away. She jumps to a logical conclusion: grave robbery. She runs back and finds Peter and the beloved disciple, whom we traditionally identify as John.

Mary tells them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Peter and John race to the tomb. John is younger and faster. He's a couple steps ahead of Peter when they reach the tomb. But John pauses at the entrance and Peter barrels in.

Sure enough, the tomb is empty. All they see are empty linen wrappings. Something about the way they're arranged suggests something other than grave robbery to John. Our text says that "he saw and believed." And yet paradoxically it also says that he "did not (yet) understand the scripture" that said that Jesus "must rise from the dead."

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<sup>1</sup> Most played in the year 1997, and 2<sup>nd</sup> most played in 1995

Peter is probably just confused. But John is again, perhaps, a couple steps ahead of Peter—John senses there's something marvelous going on. But yet again, John has not yet crossed the finished line. In a real way, both Peter and John both are still in limbo. They go back to join the other disciples who are hiding out in fear behind locked doors. They encounter the reality of Easter. But then they return to where they were before, stuck in neutral, waiting in a state of uncertainty.

And Mary Magdalene stays behind at the tomb weeping. She is also stuck in limbo. She's stuck in her initial assessment of the situation: grave robbers. And she's stuck in all the emotional pain that brings. Amazingly, she peers in the tomb and sees a couple of angels. They ask her why she's weeping. She answers, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." In other words, grave robbery.

And then Jesus appears to Mary, but Mary doesn't yet recognize him. Jesus asks her why she's weeping. And in a deliciously ironic moment, Mary asks Jesus if he has stolen Jesus' body. And then, still in tears, she turns away from Jesus.

But Jesus calls her by name: Mary. And Mary recognizes his voice and thus finally recognizes Jesus. She turns and calls him "Rabbouni," which means, 'my great rabbi, my great teacher!' And seeing Jesus alive and present brings Mary out of her state of limbo. The joy of the Resurrection ends Mary's tears.

Mary goes back and tells the disciples the good news. But apparently, it's not enough to get them out of their state of being stuck in a state of suspended animation. Because later that night, they're still in the same place. The disciples are still cowering behind locked doors afraid of being arrested and executed like Jesus was.

We'll hear that Gospel lesson next Sunday, the second half of John chapter 20. Jesus will appear to his fearful disciples on Easter night. Again, his presence will get them out of neutral. They won't be stuck behind locked doors hiding out in fear. In years to come, they will go out boldly and risk their lives, not fearing getting arrested, even when they are thrown in jail, not fearing death, even as they are being executed. After encountering the resurrected Jesus, the disciples will not be trapped in fear in the same way ever again.

But there's one more resurrection appearance in John's Gospel. We'll hear that Gospel lesson in 2 weeks, from chapter 21. At this point the disciples are no longer fearful. But they're also not sure about what their path forward should be.

Seven of them are back home by the sea of Galilee. And Peter suggests that they go out and fish like they used to. And they go out all night, and catch nothing. They're in a different kind of limbo. Like the rock group Kansas, these disciples have returned home and have returned to their old ways, not knowing where to go or what to do. Even though the resurrection has happened, even though events have been set in motion that will change their trajectory forever, they're just not quite at that point where the changes are apparent.

But then the next morning, Jesus appears to them. He tells them to try fishing on the other side of the boat. And when they do, they haul in an incredible number of fish.

And this miraculous catch is an indicator that they need to be fishing in a new way, fishing for people, going out and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is alive has been raised from death itself. After this, they will live new lives and never return to commercial fishing again. They will live as apostles and ambassadors of the resurrection.

There are many ways to get stuck. And John's Easter accounts, the disciples find themselves stuck in various ways.

Mary Magdalene is stuck in the raw emotions, stuck in tears.

Peter, John, and the other male disciples are stuck in neutral, stuck in fear.

And a little later, even after Jesus has appeared to them, they find themselves stuck in old ways, not knowing where to go.

And yet, after the resurrection they all move forward. They are all changed. All those changes don't happen instantaneously. The various disciples will still have to grow into the fulness of what new life in Jesus Christ is all about. And of course, none of us on this side of heaven ever reaches the finish line. But after the Resurrection, the disciples are on their way, moving forward, carrying on.

When Kansas recorded their album, they didn't experience instant stardom, instant success. A year later, when the album was released, they didn't cross the finish line. They started playing in bigger and better venues. But they still had to work to share their music with others.

A couple years later they scored their first big hit with "Carry on Wayward Son." And I believe the song was reflective of their struggles and their changes up to that point. The title was not "You've Arrived." It was "Carry on."

The song opens with the words of the chorus:

*Carry on, my wayward son*

*There'll be peace when you are done*

*Lay your weary head to rest*

*Don't you cry no more*

Those are words of future promise. And those are words of perseverance as you grow and live into the promise.

The verses deal with many struggles of life. Noise and confusion. The storminess of emotions in life. Being tossed about like a ship adrift on the ocean.

And yet, over and over again, the chorus is insistent: "Carry on... There'll be peace... Don't you cry no more."

And then towards the end of the song are the triumphant words of the bridge:

*Carry on, you will always remember  
Carry on, nothing equals the splendor  
Now your life's no longer empty  
Surely heaven waits for you*

Those are wonderful words for us on Easter Day.

"Carry on... always remember."

Remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. This is the greatest news ever. We may not understand all the ramifications of what that means. But we can live more and more in the joy and freedom the resurrection brings. So carry on, and don't get stuck.

"Nothing equals the splendor."

Jesus is raised into new life. And he offers that new life to all who believe and trust in him. The splendor, the glory that he has, is something we can share in. Easter is not just about new life for Jesus. It is about new life for us.

"Now your life's no longer empty. Surely heaven waits for you."

We don't have to live in limbo. Yes, we wait to experience the total and complete fullness of the resurrection. But as we wait, we can also begin to live in a new way now. That can give our lives meaning and direction and purpose. Life is no longer empty. For Jesus will raise us from death. We too will be immortal. Heaven waits for you.

So, "Don't you cry no more."

Mourning and crying and pain and death will all pass away.

"There'll be peace when you are done."

Perfect, eternal, heavenly peace awaits all who live in the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as you wait to experience that splendor, "Carry on."