



Sunday April 17, 2022
Luke 24:1-12 (Easter Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Get the choir and praise band ready, cue the trumpets and cymbals, bring in more lilies! ***Christ is risen!*** Except, what the women hear from the two heavenly messengers at the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning is a snarky sounding question, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*”

You have to admit, this is a strange way to announce the greatest good news ever. And yet, this is precisely what welcomes those heartbroken, yet devoted women who go to the tomb early in the morning on that Sunday to finish preparing the body of Jesus for burial. And even now, on *this* Easter morning, even among our shouts of Alleluia, Christ is Risen, the angels’ question continues to call out to us just the same, “*why do you look for the living among the dead?*”

Let me recap the events of Holy Week for you. On Monday and Tuesday, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders escalated. On Wednesday Judas met with the religious leaders and arranged for Jesus’ betrayal. On Thursday Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room and shared the Last Supper with them. Later that same night he was arrested while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Early Friday morning Jesus was tried before Pilate and sentenced to death. By Friday evening Jesus was crucified, dead and lay in a dark and cold tomb. Saturday was a Sabbath day of rest. And at last, we arrive at Sunday morning. Easter morning.

Imagine how the disciples felt at that moment. They were in shock from the events that had taken place over the last few days. They were in mourning over the death of their Lord and friend. And they were hiding in fear for their own lives. Jesus had warned them that the road to Jerusalem was the road to suffering and the cross, but somehow, they didn’t understand. Had it all come to *this*? Had all their hopes ended in failure? Had everything been for nothing? Imagine how dejected they were after they had seen all their hopes and dreams – all they had given up everything for...nailed onto a cross to die. They had invested everything in him! How could it all have gone so wrong?

One of the common elements of the resurrection stories across the gospels is that no one expects the resurrection. Even though Jesus predicted his death and resurrection several times throughout his ministry, still no one initially celebrates the empty tomb by saying, “*Praise God!*” No one shouts “*Hallelujah*” when they see that their friend and Lord is no longer lying dead in the tomb. And absolutely no one, upon seeing the empty tomb rejoices in the fact that death itself could not hold the Son of God captive and says, “*I knew it, just like he said!*”

No one expects resurrection and *no one*, quite honestly, believes it at first. Even the women who went to the tomb early on that morning brought with them traditional burial spices they had prepared fully expecting to anoint Jesus’ dead body. They had absolutely no anticipation that he has been raised.

“*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*” It’s a great question! We don’t normally look for the *dead among the living*, so why then would we look for the *living among the dead*? The beauty of this question is that it implies its own answer.

Jesus told his followers again and again what would happen to him when they got to Jerusalem. He told them that he would suffer. He told them that he would be crucified. He told them that on the third day he would rise from the dead.

So, Jesus’ arrest should not have been a surprise to his followers. Jesus’ crucifixion and death should not have been a surprise either. And even Jesus’ resurrection should not have been a surprise. Jesus told them about all these things in advance. And yet somehow the meaning of all these things escaped them...and us.

Could it be that these divine messengers are concerned not so much with shaming, but rather with opening the eyes of those who grieve over Jesus? What if their question, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead,*” is expressed not with disapproval but immersed with compassion and hope?

Because the fact is, none of the resurrection accounts come equipped with a user manual that explains exactly what the resurrection is supposed to mean for us. Which may explain why in all four accounts, the news that “*Christ Has Risen*” is met more with confusion and discomfort than with immediate joyful celebration.



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So, when the angels ask, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead,*” they’re really conveying two things. First, it’s a crafty way of announcing, by implication, that Christ has risen. But second, it’s a rhetorical question about the depth and strength of our spiritual life. “*Why do you look for life among things that cannot give you true fulfillment, things that lead to spiritual death?*”

What are some of those wrong places that you go looking for life; places that turn out to be dead ends – those dead places that fuel corruption, deception, racism, sexism, suspicion, rejection, oppression, judgment, and fear. Or maybe you look for life in the status of a good education or a good job? A good partner? Great children or financial success? Perhaps in new cars, boats, houses, or accumulating lots of toys? Maybe it’s in the thrill of exciting adventures or elaborate vacations? How about in the power of being in complete control of your life? Or maybe it’s in the need to make someone else wrong in order to feel better about yourself?

The bottom line is, this is the very question we *need* to hear from these heavenly messengers when we wrap ourselves with selfishness, narcissism, or self-complacency. When we’re seduced by earthly powers and the things of this world. Why do we seek so many things that cannot give us life? Why are we so intent on looking for life in practices that are filled with death? Why do we give the best of ourselves to things that can never love us back?

When Jesus triumphs over death, he also defeats all those lesser things that keep human life from being all that it could be—things like poverty, disease, addiction, or abuse. His resurrection breaks the grip that cancer or a lost job or the wrong election outcome or the death of a loved one can have on our life.

And not just on this day, but why do we proclaim that Christ is risen and alive, and yet in the very next breath we turn around and try to find our identity, purpose, meaning, and our value elsewhere? Those things may offer us the false promise of life, but they don’t provide life, and in many instances, they may even lead us closer to “death” – toward things that are detrimental to the abundant life God promises. The angels are telling the women and us, you’re looking for the wrong thing, and you’re looking in the wrong place.

And then, the end of the verse offers us an unimaginable gift which is everything we need...for hope, for peace, for reassurance, for restoration, for joy, for life – “***he is not here; he is risen.***”

My friends, the Easter promise, the promise of resurrection is about a God who will not let anything interfere with his desire to love us, to restore us, to rescue us – to give us life. The journey through Holy Week – the betrayal, the foot washing, the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the empty tomb are about God breaking all the rules out of love for us. ***Christ is risen!***

Our God is the God of *possible* – the God who shatters the *impossible*, the God who on Easter surprises us again and again just like those women who expected to arrive at the tomb to find the dead body of Jesus.

Instead, what they found was the fulfillment of a promise that seemed too extraordinary...too impossible...too unbelievable...and instead God surprised them. And the empty tomb should surprise us...it should cause us to stand in awe...to be frozen in wonder at what God has promised – and to rejoice in hope at what God has accomplished out of love for us.

“*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*”

Christ is Risen...He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Christ is Risen...he is risen indeed. Alleluia! Thanks be to God. Amen!