

The Resurrection of Jesus

Luke:24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body.^[a] ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women^[b] were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men^[c] said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.^[d] ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.^[e]

As any honest pastor will tell you, Easter Sunday is a big deal and clergy almost universally feel the pressure. It is typically a highly attended service, much like Christmas, with family and friends visiting from out of town. Many pastors strive to tell the story of Easter in a new way, or give some new insight. The pressure does sometimes lead to poor choices. One unfortunate pastor decided to post big banners outside

advertising his Easter sermon series which was called “Nailed It,” and was surprised to find people objected. After all, he said it was Biblical.

Another church did a little play and decided to use fire as the stone was rolled away from the tomb because what could possibly go wrong? Unfortunately for them the tomb was made of fake rock and promptly caught on fire, distracting from the resurrection when a panicked congregante charged the stage to collect the now flaming stone and run off with it.

When I was preparing for seminary the pastor of my home church in Savannah gave me many words of wisdom, and I remember well his words on Easter Sunday. Keep it simple. Preach the gospel, Christ crucified, buried, and risen again. And though he never said it explicitly, I imagine he would advise me not to set anything on fire.

We have come a long way in the past few weeks of Lent. We have journeyed with our Lord to Jerusalem. We have joined in with the crowd shouting loud “Hosanna! Save us!” We have watched as the crowd, ready for a coronation in the morning, screams for an execution by evening. We have watched the crowd turn, seen the anguish of our Lord

in the garden of Gethsemane, and watched as he willingly submitted to crooked trials, torture, and death on a cross. We have waited in despair and fear on Holy Saturday with the disciples, who feared for their own lives, should the crowd be so inclined to pursue them as well. And now, we walk with downtrodden women who are prepared to perform one last act of love and tend to the body of their master, Jesus Christ.

These women walk to the tomb, expecting to find the lifeless, broken body of Jesus, and expecting to prepare that body for its final burial, to be left in the tomb and eventually to turn to dust. And yet these women find the tomb empty. The stone rolled away. The death they had expected to meet was not there. They are understandably perplexed. As they ponder, two messengers of the Lord appear with a very important question.

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6** He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7** that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

The women and the disciples were seeking the living among the dead, looking for the risen Lord in an empty tomb, but he is not there. He has risen. It was time to stop looking for the living among the dead. It was time to look for life where it could be found, in the risen Jesus Christ.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? This is no small question. This question begins to move the women from death to life, from penitence to grace, from sorrow to joy. It reframes everything that has happened in the past few weeks from failure to triumph. We shall no longer seek the living among the dead. He is not here. He has risen!

Why do you seek the living among the dead? This question changes everything. The disciples go from huddling in a room, frightened, to the apostles who would carry the Gospel to the very ends of the Earth. They told everyone who would listen that Jesus had been born, had died, and had risen again, and because of that, all could be reconciled to God. Each of the apostles, with the exception of John, would lay down their life in martyrdom for their faith and to further spread the Gospel. Once they stopped seeking the living among the

dead, they were bold, fearless, completely changed, and as a result, the entire world was changed. They lived every moment in light of the empty tomb. They learned to look for life where it might be found.

So often today we still look for the living among the dead. We live in a world that is broken in so many ways. We are plagued by wars, and all the devastation and heartbreak that can bring. Many of us struggle to make ends meet. Others struggle with mental health issues that make daily life difficult. Some are hurting from shattered relationships. Some grieve the loss of loved ones, the loss of the life they had, or of lives that could have been.

We try to fill the longing, struggles and brokenness common to all humans with things which can never heal us. We look for peace among drugs and alcohol. We look for unconditional love in broken and toxic relationships. We look for worth in money and possessions. We look for salvation in others, who are just as broken as we are. We look for life among death. And we come up empty-handed, more broken than we started.

Even success by our world's standards will not fill the emptiness. Some of the world's most successful people found only misery. I want to share with you some quotes from some of the wealthiest and most successful people of recent generations.

John D. Rockefeller once said, "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness. I would barter them all for the days I sat on an office stool in Cleveland and counted myself rich on three dollars a week." W. H. Vanderbilt said, "The care of 200 million dollars is too great a load for any brain or back to bear. It is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it." John Jacob Astor once said, "I am the most miserable man on earth." Henry Ford once said, "Work is the only pleasure. It is only work that keeps me alive and makes life worth living. I was happier when doing a mechanic's job." And finally, Andrew Carnegie, the multi-millionaire, said, "Millionaires seldom smile." They sought life among the dead, and found only sorrow.

Why do we seek the living among the dead?

Some of you have probably seen the wedding show Bridezilla. If you haven't, it follows a young bride who seems convinced that the perfect

wedding will make for the perfect life, and as such, is bound and determined to get it at any cost. Inevitably during the show, they will ask her why she chose her partner and the answers are typically along the lines of “he completes me.”

My favorite episodes are the follow-ups, where they reveal what became of the couple. More often than not the couple soon realizes that perfect day was not perfect, and did not make for a perfect life. They also soon realize that their partner cannot possibly complete them. They sought happiness and healing in things which could never satisfy, and find themselves worse off than when they started. Why do you seek the living among the dead?

The only answer to the struggles we face, the only thing which can fill the cracks in our souls, is the risen Lord. Why do we look for peace among drugs and alcohol? Look for peace in a manger where our Lord has been born. Why do we look for unconditional love from people who are just as broken as we are? Look for love in the scars on Jesus’ outstretched hands. Why do we look for worth in money and possessions? Look for worth in the savior that willingly traded his life for ours. Why do we look to others,

who are just as lost as we are, to save us? Look instead to the good news of an empty tomb and a risen Lord. Do not look for the living among the dead. Look instead to our living savior.

Today is Easter, the celebration of that empty tomb, of the knowledge that Christ was born for us, Christ died for us, and Christ was raised for us, conquering death and reconciling us to God in love and grace. This is the most important moment in all of history, the moment death was killed. This changes everything. Every moment, every breath, is different now. We are new creations, an Easter people, forged in those early morning hours when the tomb was found empty, bewildered women by our side, just beginning to learn to stop seeking the living among the dead.

But Easter is not meant to be a single day. It is meant to be our lives. We are an Easter people, and should live every moment of our lives steeped in the truth that the tomb is empty, that Jesus is not there, because he has risen. Every day, every moment, is meant to be Easter for us, touched by the miracle these women discovered.

Today, as you go from here perhaps to family dinners, easter chocolate and candy, remember that Easter is not just a day, it is who we are meant to be. Live every moment in light of the empty tomb. Look for life where it might be found. Never cease to tell the story of Jesus who loves you and willing gave up his life for you, and rose again for you, because it is your story, too. Be bold and fearless and completely changed by the resurrection. And just as the apostles did, we too can give good news and hope to the hurting and oppressed, change our communities, and even change the world when we live every day as Easter people, and learn to look for life where it might be found. He is risen, indeed!

Rev. Kate Mauch, April 17, 2022