

The Resurrection of Our Lord
St. Luke 24:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

What a week it has been. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, hailed as a king. He was captured by the representatives of the temple, beaten and mocked. He was brought before the Roman governor, found innocent, before Herod, found innocent, before the Roman governor, found innocent...innocent, innocent, then guilty of nothing. He was beaten and mocked again, scourged to within an inch of his life, and ultimately, crucified.

The day was getting late, so the people asked Pilate to have the legs of the three men broken so that they would die faster, so that they would die before the Sabbath. The two criminals on either side of Jesus had their legs broken, but the soldiers found Jesus already dead. His bones they did not break. To confirm that He was dead, one took a spear and pierced His side, and at once, blood and water came forth.

He was dead. He was brought down from the cross. He was covered in spices and oils and wrapped in linen cloths. He was put into a tomb in which no one had yet been buried. A stone was placed in front of the entrance to the tomb. The deed was done.

These things you have heard over and over again every Wednesday in Lent, then all over again last week.

"Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." (Luke 23:56) It was the Sabbath—the seventh day. Even in death, Jesus obeyed the Law perfectly—He rested in a tomb.

The next day, the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb to do what was expected of them. These women—among whom is Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, but also many other women who had followed Jesus and attended to Him—they brought their spices and oils—their myrrh and aloes. They approached the tomb and find a frightening sight: the stone had been removed from in front of the entrance! They had gone to "spice up" Jesus' body, and then wonder if the body is even there.

I like to say that the door was pushed aside not to let Jesus out, but to let people in (as I said last night). It makes sense: the risen Lord was twice able to appear to the disciples hiding in the upper room with the doors locked—He made it in without an open door (as you'll hear next week, cf. John 20:19-30). Therefore, He didn't need an open tomb to get out. But for these women, and later for Peter and John, the stone was pushed aside so that they could go in and look.

So, these women went into or peered into the tomb. They found that Jesus' body was not there. Others wrote that they thought that His body had been stolen. They were troubled by what they had found—an empty tomb, bereft of a body—they were greatly perplexed by it.

And that's when it happened. Two men appeared before them in dazzling white clothes. The women, having a mountain-top experience not unlike that of Peter, James, and John, fell to the ground. The Divine was manifesting in their presence—He had sent representatives, messengers, to them—and the women were afraid.

And they ask, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" These are words designed to allay fears. "He is not here, but has risen!" These are words designed to change their perception of the empty tomb. "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be

delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." These are words designed to bring to mind what was taught to them...what was spoken to them.

They recalled the Jesus' words. They dropped their spices. They hurried to report what they had found.

What they had found... Such simple words turn a frightening and saddening and perplexing situation into one of immense joy and hope. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" They went to the tomb expecting a dead body to "spice it up;" they depart from the tomb with joyous news: "Christ is risen!" Dr. Arthur Just wrote,

The women begin this eighth, eschatological day—"the first day" of the new week—from the perspective of the old covenant. But now they remember the words of the Lord and through faith are incorporated into the new covenant. They have been transformed through the announcement of the angels on the first day of the new era of salvation.

Such simple words can turn a hopeless situation in this world around, especially if they are received in faith. Life is so often sought among the dead: dead works, dead people, dead religions, even in one's dead self. All your works amount to nothing, they do not bring life. People around you, no matter how much charisma they may possess, do not bring life. Being good, doing things the right way, keeping to a good pattern of living or set of habits does not bring life. Finding your "inner self" and "inner peace" does not bring life. Following these "dead things" is death. Why look for the living among these dead things? He is not in them, but Christ has died and Christ is risen, as He said.

As He said... It is as Peter once said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You," You alone, "have the words of eternal life" (cf. John 6:68), even as Jesus before that had said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63) And so the words He spoke are spoken again: "[T]he Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." "Remember these words," the angels instructed the women. In them are life. They are the words of eternal life. They are life!

Oh, to be sure, you can get great examples of good works from motivational speakers and spiritual leaders, but there is no dying and rising there. You can get a good set of rituals to follow from other religions, but there is no dying and rising there. You can even meditate to bring about what others would call "harmony" or "peace" within yourself, but there is no dying and rising there. The answer to that dreaded question "What would Jesus do?" is die and rise from the dead.

Dying and rising is uniquely Jesus. It is what He said. It is how He saved the world. He didn't come to set a good example of good works. He didn't come to establish a new religion. He didn't come to teach you how to search within yourself for true peace and happiness. These are dead things. Christ died to them that you may die to them and rise again that you may pass from death into life with Him. That's how He deals with you—with your sins and clinging to dead things—by dying in your place and rising from the dead on the third day to give you life. It all goes to show that there is life in nothing else, except Him, so that you can echo Peter's words, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24) St. Paul explained, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:4a, 5)

It's a good thing to hear these words again...to hear them again and again and again. Why? Because you are bombarded by death everywhere you look. You see friends and family die. You see

dead animals along the side of the road, and must even endure the death of pets you love. You get the news of a terminal illness, putting your own mortality before you! There are tales of all of those “dead things” mentioned earlier placed before you which constantly entice you. All of this death and mortality can leave you hopeless. Death is an unnatural part of life—natural only to the sinful life—so, you need to hear constantly the news of everlasting life, of that restored perfect life once intended for you—you need to hear constantly the words of eternal life.

You need Easter...constantly. You need to hear the news of the stone pushed aside, that the tomb is empty. You need to hear that, because it is not the distressing fact that someone has taken Jesus’ body, but because of the joyful fact that Jesus is living and not to be found among the dead! You need this constantly because it is life for you, life in the midst of death! “[O]ur Savior Christ Jesus... brought life and immortality to light...,” St. Paul wrote to Timothy. (2 Timothy 1:10)

And so, you need Jesus...always! That’s why you come to this place of the living, where Jesus is, to receive Him. You hear the good news of sins forgiven in the spoken word of the Absolution, and the living Jesus is there. You hear the good news of sins forgiven as you sing hymns of Jesus’ work on your behalf, and the living Jesus is there. You hear the good news of sins forgiven as the Word is proclaimed in the sermon, and the living Jesus is there. You hear the good news of sins forgiven as you receive the very body and blood sacrificed for you on the tree of the cross, and the living Jesus is there. Dear hearers, not only do you hear this good news, but you receive it personally as it is applied to each one of you and does the forgiving thing to each one of you. “For the word of God is living and active...” (cf. Hebrews 4:12)

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” Such joyous and hope-filled words. The women rushed to tell this good news. They reported what had happened. Most who heard this good news thought it nonsense, but not Peter.

Hopefully and expectantly, He rushed to the tomb and found only the linen cloths in the tomb. A baby wrapped in swaddling clothes was a sign of the Messiah’s birth; linen cloths alone are a sign of the risen Messiah. He goes back, marveling at all that had happened. Marveling is a reaction to the things Jesus did throughout Luke’s gospel, not of outright rejection or disbelief, but of struggling to understand what one cannot explain. “Christ is risen!” Peter’s hope had been confirmed, even if he had a hard time putting it all together.

It’s a hope you share, even if you fail to comprehend it or comprehend it fully. Thankfully, your life in Christ is not dependent on your comprehension. Thankfully, your comprehension doesn’t cloud the proclamation of the good news the angels announced—“He is risen!”—nor does it dim your hope found in that announcement—“He is risen!”

That is shout of joy this day and every day! It is your word of hope in a lifeless world—a world dead in sin. “Christ is risen—He is alive!” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...” (John 11:25) St. Paul explained, “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22) Therefore, you can look death in the face with joy and hope knowing that since you are in Christ, you will be made alive, you have been made alive—you have life!

Christ has died for you and Christ is risen for you! Hallelujah! You have died and were buried with Christ through Baptism into His death—that is, you have been united with Him in the likeness of His death—therefore, you will be united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. Hallelujah! Therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins! Hallelujah!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.