

**Theme: Ironies of the Passion: “Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?”**

**Luke 24:4-8 (EHV)**

**<sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothing. <sup>5</sup> The women were terrified and bowed down with their faces to the ground. The men said to them, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has been raised! Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again?” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.**

If you are looking for groceries would you drive to an empty lot and wonder where the meat department is? If you are looking for the airport would you drive to the beach and wonder where all the airplanes are? If you are going to a friend’s or family member’s house today for Easter dinner would you drive to a cemetery and wonder, “Where is everyone at?” Of course not! Why would you look for groceries in an empty lot? Why would you look for the airport on the beach? And why would you look for the living among the dead?

That’s the question the angels asked the women who were looking for Jesus early that first Easter Sunday morning, **“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” (v. 5)**. Now, it’s perfectly understandable why these women were looking for Jesus here. Just a few verses earlier in the previous chapter of the Gospel of Luke we’re told that **The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed after Joseph [of Arimathea], and they observed the tomb and how his body was laid there. (Luke 23:55 EHV)**. This was exactly where they thought Jesus would be. Of course it was! They saw Him die. They saw Joseph wrap Jesus’ body in linen and bury Him in this tomb. Where else would they expect Jesus to be?

Well, remember the definition of irony that we’ve been considering in our Lenten series: *Ironies of the Passion?* Irony is “a result that is the opposite of what might be expected.” The women came to the tomb expecting to find a dead Jesus, not a living Savior. They certainly weren’t expecting to find two dazzling angels at the tomb telling them that Jesus was alive.

Like I said, this was perfectly understandable. But at the same time, they should have known better. Really?! How can we possibly say that? Well, listen again to the words of the angels. Their words are an incredible message of great joy, but they are also a rebuke of their lack of faith and understanding: **“Why are you looking for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has been raised! Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again?” (v. 5-7)**. Again and again, going all the way back to Galilee, Jesus had told his disciples exactly what the angels reminded the women of here: I will suffer, I will be crucified, and on the third day I will rise again (**see Matthew 20:18-19; Mark 8:31-32; 10:33-34; Luke 18:33**).

Maybe they thought He was speaking in parables or being symbolic? Whatever the reason, the problem was they never understood what He was talking about or believed His straightforward, simple words. Besides that, just a few weeks earlier Jesus had miraculously *proved* His power over death by raising Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days, back to life! They had every reason to believe! These women, and the rest of Jesus’ disciples, should have trusted His words and promises and come to the tomb in hope expecting to find a living Savior. But instead their reason, their doubts, their sadness, and their own sinful weakness brought them to the tomb looking for a dead Jesus.

We can identify with these humble women who loved their Lord, can't we? We love Him. We believe in Him, but our faith is often weak too. Especially when we hurt, when life seems impossible, when death is looking us in the face—our own death or the death of people we love—the natural response for us is simply to try to cope. Our natural response is to wrap ourselves in sorrow and give in to despair, or at best, just try and put one foot in front of the other and get through it. We can easily leave Jesus and his promises out of the picture.

Is that so very different from what these women did when they looked for their Lord in a tomb? The angels owe us the same rebuke, don't they? But remember what they said in the very next breath: **"He is not here; He has risen!"** In his great love, Jesus did the impossible. He died on the cross and paid for our sin and then rose from the dead. Now death is not the end. Death is not the victor. All those who die trusting in Jesus will live with him forever—even if their faith is weak like it was for these women on that first Easter morning. Day by day, the power of the resurrection—the Gospel—is a living force that changes our hearts. It is the source of strength for our faith, especially on the days when life hurts and death comes.

All too often, when our faith is weak, when we're dissatisfied, when we feel guilty and ashamed, we look for Jesus in all the wrong places. The great irony of the resurrection is that Jesus is not found where people expect Him to be. Instead, He's found right where He said He would be: in the Gospel, in His Word and Sacraments. We find him in the Word that's preached and taught to us. We find him in our Bibles. We find Him in our baptisms, which washed our sins away, and in the Lord's Supper, where we receive the actual body and blood of the Lord.

But that isn't the natural place for people to look for Him. At times it's not where we look for Him either. We want to find Him in our own hearts. We look for Him in our feelings. We feel a need to hear Him speak to us in the world around us, or to reveal Himself to us in some sort of miracle that we can see and observe with our own eyes. When we do this we are essentially "looking for the living among the dead."

We too need to hear the words of the angels in our text that point us to Jesus' own words, **"Remember [what] he told you" (v. 6)**. The last verse of our sermon text tells us, **"Then they remembered his words" (v. 8)**. Suddenly, it all came flooding back to them. With this simple expression, Luke shows the power of the Holy Spirit to create, strengthen, and clarify faith. And what did they remember? They remembered the Gospel, Jesus' promise of everlasting life. That's where the power is, and when these women heard it, they believed. When they remembered Jesus' promise and began to understand that He had kept it, they began to trust in all of God's promises.

**"Remember [what] he told you" (v. 6)**. Remember Jesus' words and promises. Remember His resurrection. Jesus' return to life brings us back to life. We don't want to look for Him among the dead, but He did have to look for us in a spiritual graveyard. Our hearts were dead in trespasses and sins, but His resurrection is more powerful than sin or death. It creates new life. It changes who and what we are. The truth is that on our own, we would only look for Jesus in the wrong places. So He came to us. We have Him every time we come to Communion; every time we remember the gift he gave us in Baptism; we have Him every time we hear the Gospel.

Today, we come to Jesus' house not "looking for the living among the dead," but to see our living Savior! To rejoice in the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty, that the women heard the greatest proclamation of all time: **"He is not here. He has risen, just as he said" (Matthew 28:6 EHV)**. Jesus kept his promise. We don't have to go to a cemetery to find Him. We don't need to look inside ourselves, or in the world around us to find Him either. He's right where He said He would be: in His Word, the Gospel. His Word assures us that He is alive—He has risen! Because He is alive, God promises us that all our sins are wiped out and forgotten. Because He is alive, God promises us that we will live with Him forever. Because He is alive, we have a new life already here—our life of faith in Him. Let's rejoice in that life now, and look forward to eternal life with Him.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.