

Theme: We follow Jesus

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we rejoice with you the anniversary of the breaking of the bonds of death and the rising of your son: may we always wonder at this amazing miracle that we, too, get to participate in, through our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was a Sunday morning, just as dawn was breaking, when the shadows and darkness was giving way to the light of day. The women who followed Jesus from Galilee went to his tomb. They were carrying spices to anoint his body, giving Jesus a proper burial. There was no time to do this before the Sabbath began just after Jesus' death. The men were probably still asleep.

When they arrived, the stone securing the tomb had been rolled away. Maybe they thought that someone was careless by not securing the tomb. Grave robbers were also common in those days. They may have left the tomb open. In spite of this peculiarity, they went into the tomb anyway. The tomb was empty.

When I go to find something and it's not where I left it, then I start scratching my head. After reviewing my steps and actions and am convinced I am in the right place, then I start to get frustrated. I know I am sure, but I can't be right. Something is really out of whack. Those may be the same feelings the women felt on that first Easter morning.

They were still puzzled over this situation when suddenly, two men with really bright clothing stood beside them. At first they're puzzled and now two men suddenly appear. So on top of everything else, they are now probably frightened. "Should I run? Should I fight? The hole to the tomb is very small." Too many options – not enough time. The terrified women bowed to the ground. A submissive act may get them out of this unharmed.

Then the men said, "Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here! He has been raised from death. Remember that while he was still in Galilee, he told you, 'The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will rise to life.'" Then they remembered what Jesus said.

We tend to always do this. We cling to old ideas, refusing the new. We look for the living among the dead. Dead ideas are not allowed to be buried. We keep them with us like dear old friends. We keep doing church the way we always did it and wonder why we decline. We keep our loved ones close to us and wonder why they won't grow. We refuse to look for the living, preferring to keep the dead close to us.

The men call the women to remembrance. Remember what Jesus did and said in Galilee. Remember and the empty tomb will make sense. The mystery of the resurrection is grounded in every day life made clearer to us in Jesus' teachings.

The women went to tell the apostles what they saw and what they heard. Among those women were: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James.

The apostles heard this report and wrote it off as women's foolish prattle. Peter though was curious about their story. He ran to the tomb and found it just as the women had reported. Now it was Peter's turn to be puzzled. Peter now tried to figure out what happened and just *where* is Jesus' body?

There are some things that don't change with time. The women understood what Jesus was about. The women understood what happened at the empty tomb. They shared their experience with the men, who also followed Jesus. The men didn't believe them and by extension they didn't believe Jesus.

This still happens today. Women outnumber men in church attendance. Women know the story of the empty tomb. They tell their men. The men can't figure it out. Obviously, there are exceptions. We used to ordain all of the exceptions, but we don't have to do that anymore. More men understand the story.

Now admittedly, this is a hard story to believe. Dead people don't rise from the dead, unless they are in a George Romero movie. And those risen people are just not very pleasant. The point is that God's ways are not our ways. Whenever we try to measure God with what we know, we will fall short.

But Jesus' rising gives us hope. We do not live our lives in futility. There is more to our existence than our time here on earth. From here we enter a world of overwhelming love. It is the world of God, we call heaven. Jesus did that for us. We have witnesses. The gender of the witnesses should not matter. It's still true.

The story of Easter is grounded in the story of Jesus. We can only understand the resurrection in light of Jesus' teachings in word and deed. Jesus ate with his enemies. Jesus healed the hopeless. Jesus challenged the powerful. That's now our job.

It is all rooted in Jesus' teachings of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a place where the dead don't stay dead. It is a place of life and life abundantly.

The following is excerpted from [*Jesus, the Final Days: What Really Happened*](#) by Craig A. Evans and N. T. Wright, and edited by Troy A. Miller.

The fourth and final strange feature of the Resurrection narratives, which may call into question many of the Easter sermons that I and others regularly preach, is **the absence of any mention of the future Christian hope.**

Almost everywhere else in the New Testament, where you find people talking about Jesus' resurrection, you find them also talking about our own future resurrection, the final hope that one day we will be raised as Jesus has been raised.

But the Gospels never say anything like, "Jesus is raised, therefore there is a life after death" (not that many first-century Jews doubted that there was); or, "Jesus is raised, therefore we shall go to heaven when we die" (most people believed something like that anyway); or better, "Jesus is raised, therefore we shall be raised at the last."

No: insofar as the event is interpreted in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it has a very "this-worldly" meaning, relating to what is happening here and now. "Jesus is raised," they say, "therefore he is the Messiah; he is the true Lord of the whole world; therefore we, his followers, have a job to do: we must act as his heralds, announcing his lordship to the entire world."

It is not, “Jesus is raised, therefore look up into the sky and keep looking because one day you will be going there with him.” Many hymns, prayers, and Christian sermons have tried to pull the Easter story in that direction, but the line of thought within the Gospels themselves is, “Jesus is raised, therefore God’s new world has begun, and therefore we, you, and everybody else are invited to be not only beneficiaries of that new world but participants in making it happen.”

We now pray: Gracious God and giver of all good gifts, thank you for the gift of eternal life: may we always in gratefulness follow your son who broke the bonds of death and taught us to change the world into your likeness, through the one who made all things new, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Text: **Luke 24:1–12** (NRSV)

¹ 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. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 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.