

Easter Sunday – March 27, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 24:5 (NIV)

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2) They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3) but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4) While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5) In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, **"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"** 6) He is not here; he has risen!

“Why Do You Look for the Living among the Dead?”

Dear Christian Friends,

There's a scene in Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" that comes to mind in thinking about today's Gospel reading about the women coming to the tomb that first Easter morning. Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn and Joe Harper set out on a raft down the Mississippi to be pirates. Everybody at home thought they were lost and dead, so the town had a funeral for the three of them on Sunday morning. At Sunday school all the people could talk about was the three boys. Here's how Twain described the scene:

"When the bell rang for Sunday school to be over, the people filed solemnly into the sanctuary for the funeral service. The preacher began talking about the three lost lads, stories so winning and touching that the people felt pangs of guilt that they hadn't seen such good in these boys when they lived but had so often seen their faults and flaws. Soon everybody was sobbing in grief.

Then there was a rustle in the back balcony and the back door creaked open. The minister, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief, looked up and stood transfixed. Here came Tom, then Joe, then Huck down the aisle. They had come home and had been hiding in the back balcony observing their own funeral service.

The congregation rushed to embrace the boys; suddenly the minister shouted, 'Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow. Sing! Put your hearts in it.' They didn't need to be told to put their hearts in it. They sang as never before. The 'Old Hundredth' swelled from the organ and their voices lifted the rafters."

Of course, those who are reading the story knew the three boys were alive up there in the balcony, but everybody else thought they were dead. In today's Gospel, it's as though we're all up in the balcony with Jesus looking at the women coming to do their funeral thing for their dead Jesus. Jesus is whispering to us, "You're going to love this part. Watch!"

There are two major differences between Twain's characters and Luke's. Twain's are fictitious and they would have gone to church that day not knowing if the boys were dead or not--hoping they were still alive--and, therefore, willing to believe their own eyes when they saw them walk in. Luke's characters are real and they had seen Jesus die. They had even seen His body being wrapped in spices and placed into the tomb. They, therefore, were in no way whatsoever prepared for what was about to be revealed to them. When they found an empty tomb, they continued looking for a dead man!

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" asked the "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning." The two men continued, "He is not here; He has risen!"

1. You have a risen Lord

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Those words have an edge to them. There is a rebuke in those words. Truly, the women were looking for someone who was dead, not someone who was alive. Put yourself in their place on that first Easter morning. Because they did not have enough time to properly prepare Jesus’ dead body for burial on the first Good Friday, these women had purchased spices with which to finish the task once the Sabbath ended. So early on Sunday morning, the women got up and, carrying the spices they had purchased, set out for the tomb. As they walked, they began to talk about the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb and sealed with Pilate’s own seal. “Who would take it away?” they wondered. They arrived, and with great grief they looked into the tomb. Then, to their great surprise, an angel greeted them and asked them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” In other words, “Why are you acting as though the Savior were still dead?” The words contained a rebuke, a rebuke of their lack of faith, a rebuke for living as though Jesus were still dead.

We too deserve this rebuke. Like those women, we carry around needless burdens. We often carry around needless burdens of guilt and shame because of our sins. We act as though Jesus were still dead and, therefore, we are still in our sins. Like the women, we worry and fret about things when we really have nothing to worry about. The women fretted about the stone and who would roll it away. How many of us don’t worry about the stones that lie ahead of us and how we will move them and roll them away? We live as though Jesus were still dead. The women came to the cemetery with great grief. They came expecting to find a dead body. We too, often stand in the cemetery and think only of the deaths of those we love and of our own deaths that are to come. We act as though Jesus were still dead.

There is another way we act as though Jesus were still dead: when we permit sin to rule and dominate our lives. Then we act as though Jesus were still dead. Why do you look for the living among the dead? When he sees us bearing needless burdens, fretting and worrying our way through life, grieving without hope over loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and when he sees us letting sin get a foothold in our lives, the Lord asks us, too, through his angel, “Why do you live as though I were still dead?” We have a risen Lord! Jesus, who was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised again for our justification. Jesus has risen, and as he was with Mary though she didn’t know it, so he is with us always to the end of the age. We have a risen Lord who has broken the power of the grave so that we can look forward to rising from the dead with our loved ones one day. We have a risen Lord who gives us the power to say “no” to sin. Let’s not live as though Jesus were dead; we have a risen Lord.

2. You have his reliable Word

“Why?” the angel asked. Why do you look for the living among the dead? The angel knew why. He said, **“He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again’”** (Lk 24:6,7). It was because the women had forgotten Jesus’ words and his promises. Jesus had told them all that was to happen to him in Jerusalem. He had predicted his betrayal and suffering and death. They had witnessed all these things, but they forgot that Jesus had predicted still one more thing: on the third day he must be raised again. The women forgot. That’s why they were bearing unnecessary burdens, worrying and fretting about things that turned out to be no problem at all, grieving over a loved one who had died—they had forgotten the words of the Savior. That’s why they were living as though Jesus was still dead. But he had risen from the dead and was alive again.

That’s what we need to remember. We need to remember that Jesus is alive and stop living as though he were still dead. When the angel asks us “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” let us remember that Jesus has risen from the dead. Instead of carrying around an unnecessary burden of guilt, let us remember that Christ Jesus, who died and was raised to life again, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. When we find ourselves worrying and fretting about the obstacles that

confront us in life, let us remember that Jesus has risen and has promised, **“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (Mt 28:20 NIV). We have a Savior who has also promised, (Isa 41:10 NIV). Jesus isn’t dead anymore; he lives and rules forever. When we go to the cemetery and grief wants to take over and drive away hope, let us remember that Jesus is not dead anymore. God raised him from the dead and has promised to raise from the dead, with Jesus, those who fall asleep in him. And when sin wants to rule our lives and dominate our hearts, let us remember that Jesus isn’t dead anymore and let us stop acting like he is. Jesus died and then was raised in the glory of the Father, and we who are united with him in Baptism have also been buried with him and have been raised to live new lives. Why do you look for the living among the dead? Why do you live as if Jesus were still dead? He has risen—let us depend on his reliable Word.

3. You have a responsibility in the world

About nine hundred years before Jesus died and rose again, a prophet named Elijah became discouraged with his work for the Lord and ran off to the desert, hid in a cave, and waited to die. The Lord found him there and asked him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Ki 19:9 NIV). The question contained a reminder for the prophet. It said, “You are a prophet of God; what are you doing here in a cave in the middle of the wilderness?” The angel’s question to the women contained the same reminder. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” The question was a reminder to the women that they had good news to tell others. They had a living Savior, and they needed to stop poking around like Jesus was still dead and, instead, go and tell the good news. The women got the message. We are told that they remembered Jesus’ words and then left the tomb and told Jesus’ disciples everything that they had seen.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? The question is still asked of us when we are tempted to poke around in our lives as if we really have no purpose here and no reason for living. Jesus has risen; we have a reason for living: it is to glorify him in all that we do. And one way that we glorify the Savior is by going and telling others about our Savior. Our Savior is alive; he lives to comfort us in life’s troubles, to give us peace in life’s turmoil, to walk with us, and to help us carry our burdens. So what are you doing here? Why do you look for the living among the dead? We have good news to tell others. Let us begin with the members of our own families and those in our neighborhoods, and then let us remember to participate in the work of telling the world about our living Savior by supporting our congregation’s and synod’s missions with offerings and prayers. No, it won’t always produce immediate results. The prophet Elijah was frustrated by the lack of expected results. On Easter morning, when the women went and told the disciples, we are told that at first the disciples did not believe the women because their words seemed like nonsense. But then, we are told that Simon Peter got up and ran to the tomb to look for himself. That’s the way it goes with us too. Perhaps our invitations seem to fall on deaf ears but the Spirit can use them for his purposes. St. Paul reminds us that our labor in the Lord is not in vain and urges us to give ourselves fully to doing God’s work. Why do you look for the living among the dead? We have a responsibility in the world. Let’s go and tell all that we have seen and heard. Amen.