

Ironies of the Passion

Why do you Look for the Living
Among the Dead?

A Sermon on Luke 24:4-8

Year C - Easter
27 - March - 2016

JJ¹

Imagine what your reaction would have been if when you came to church today you looked out in our cemetery and saw piles of dirt. Then, in curiosity you started walking into the cemetery and you realize the piles of dirt were dug up from the graves. Finally, you walk up to the grave to find the vault and casket open with nothing inside. How would you react? At first you'd probably be terrified. That terror would then probably change into anger. "What happened?!"

We realize that we would have reacted the same way as those women that first Easter so long ago. On Saturday evening, when the Jewish Sabbath was over, the women went out and purchased spices and lotions and prepared them for the next morning. They prepared these things to finish anointing Jesus' body to remain in the tomb for what they thought would be the rest of time.

The women gathered that first Easter morning with hearts drowning in sorrow. We all have lost loved ones. Some of you have lost your spouse, even children to death, and that sorrow is immense. But realize that these women thought that they had lost the One who was their Savior! Not only was a dear friend and teacher dead, they thought that they were

going to the tomb to say "goodbye" to any hope of being saved!

To all appearances, Satan had won. He had gotten what he wanted. Jesus was dead. That's what these women and Jesus' disciples thought. To them, Jesus words: "It is finished!" probably seemed more like: "I'm finished! I can't do it anymore. You're done for!" Had those women found Jesus' body in the tomb, they would have been right and there would be no hope for us.

That, friends, is how these women approach Jesus' tomb. You can easily imagine their reaction when they come to the tomb to find not only the soldiers gone, but also the large stone rolled away from the entrance to Jesus' tomb. Do they rush headlong into the tomb like Peter soon would? Or do they cautiously creep in like John? Either way, they enter the tomb and find grave clothes on the ground and the head cloth neatly folded, but no body. Jesus is missing!

For the NIV to say that "they were wondering about this" doesn't get the whole picture of the Greek word. They weren't just wondering, but they were confused and filled with anxiety. And wouldn't you be too! Imagine what you would think if you thought your enemies were

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

sticking another dagger in your gut by stealing the body of your loved one! That's what Mary Magdalene thought and ran off before "...suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening stood beside them." And the women react just like we would! "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? He is not here; he has risen!'"

And in that question and statement from the angels we find the great irony of that first Easter. Again and again Jesus had told his followers what would happen. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies of what would happen. Yet, they forgot. Jesus spoke plainly about it, just as the angels reminded them saying, "Remember, 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.'"

It's almost like the angels have a bit of holy frustration, "What are you doing here? How could you forget this?" Jesus had prepared them for this, but neither the women nor Jesus' disciples understood what he was saying. Even Mary Magdalene who seems to have understood better than anyone else when just one week earlier she anointed Jesus' feet (Jn. 12:1-8) ran off in terror and grief. Je-

sus had spoken plainly and simply to them, but they kept trying to make it into a parable with some deeper meaning. It's like I have to sometimes tell the Bible Class or Catechism Class, "Stop thinking so hard."

Apart from my flawed instruction or questions, we all too often react like those believers so long ago to God's clear Word. In weakness of faith we also struggle to cling to God's promises, especially when we face those horrible moments in

life like these women. It's so easy for us to leave Jesus and his promises out of the picture when we suffer and struggle and let ourselves become consumed with our grief and pain. Sometimes we even go looking for Jesus in the wrong places! Instead of seeking him out where he told us he would be, we try to find him in our feelings or signs in the world around us.



It's then that we need the angels to come to us with those same words, "**WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN! Remember, he told you...**"

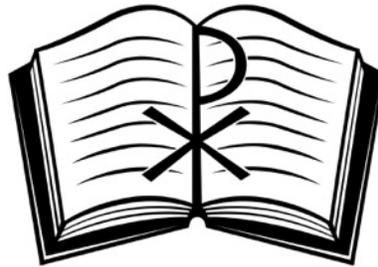
Did you catch it? Where did the angels point the women? Did they point them to their feelings or signs in the world around them? Nope! Not at all. They point the women to Jesus' words and promises. Friends, that is where we are pointed too. You won't find Jesus where

the world expects to find him today any more than grief-stricken hearts were expecting to find him that first Easter. Jesus is right where he said he would be—in his Word.

Imagine what a difference that would have made had the women and the disciples remembered Jesus' words and believed them! It still would have been awful and gruesome to see Jesus suffer and die as he did, but instead of hiding in fear they would have been keeping vigil at Jesus' tomb waiting for him to come out, just like they saw Lazarus do just a few weeks earlier.

Friends, imagine what a difference it would make in our daily lives if every day we reminded ourselves of and meditated on this greatest news and considered its consequences for us: **HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!** Our Lord encourages us to do this very thing every day. To remember that Jesus' death means our life—Jesus' suffering means our joy—Jesus' wounds mean our healing!

That's exactly what happened for the women so long ago. They remembered Jesus' words. The Holy Spirit broke through their doubts and misbeliefs with



the truth of Jesus' words. Their hearts were now at peace and filled with joy. How do we know? They went off running to tell others this good news!

Friends, when the troubles and terrors of life bombard you, remember and believe the words and promises of your Savior, Jesus. Your Savior is not a dead savior who cannot help you or deliver you. Your Savior is *the* Savior who lives and because he lives he has delivered you from the greatest trouble of sin and the ultimate terror of hell! Jesus' tomb is empty. And that is a beautiful thing! It's beautiful be-

cause it also means that one day you're going to see empty tombs too. You'll see the empty tombs of all those who have died. And if the Lord doesn't return before you die, you'll see your own empty tomb too! And on that day, you, along with

all God's people, will rejoice with shouts of joy: "Because our Savior lives, we too are living!" But until that day comes, friends, go in the same joy of those women so long ago to spread the news: **HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!** Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

