

EASTER SUNDAY
April 21, 2019

Text: Luke 24:1-12

Theme: The Garden Tomb

During this Holy Week we have visualized Jesus descending the steep path from the Mount of Olives into the city of Jerusalem. From there we shared a meal with him and his disciples in the Upper Room only to follow him to the Garden of Gethsemane where he knelt down in prayer before being arrested by the temple police. On Good Friday we stood at the foot of the cross in the place called the *Skull* and once Jesus took his last breath his body was taken down and laid to rest in what is now known as the *Garden Tomb* that is located just outside the city walls. It is one of the most peaceful places out of all the holy sites in and around Jerusalem.

Once more on this Easter Sunday our hearts are overflowing with joy! We join the psalmist who proclaims with confidence that this is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it for Christ is alive! Christ has been raised!

Our alleluias return as we sing our victory songs to the God who (once and for all) has shown us how he conquered sin, death, and the devil through the life, death, and resurrection of his only Son, Jesus Christ. On this most holy day we give thanks to the Lord our God for his steadfast love. Alleluia!

I can feel the excitement just standing here in the pulpit today!

But did you notice that the joy we are experiencing is lacking in the story we read this morning? Even though Jesus predicted his death and resurrection at least three different times in his ministry, no one greeted the news that God has raised Jesus from the grave by saying – *Praise the Lord!*

No one is shouting – *Alleluia!* And absolutely no one is saying – *I knew it. It happened just like Jesus said it would.*

Some women went to the tomb expecting to anoint a dead body. But they found no body to anoint.

It perplexed them until they saw these two men in dazzling clothes who reminded them of what Jesus had said when they were all together in Galilee. Once their memories were refreshed, they returned to the other disciples and shared the news. But once more we do not hear – *Praise the Lord! Alleluia! We knew it!*

No! The rest of the disciples heard their testimony and responded with utter skepticism. In fact, the author of our gospel said that they regarded their news as an idle tale which is a loose translation of the Greek word (*leros*). In essence, they thought what the women said was crazy, silly, utter nonsense, and just a bunch of useless chatter. They believed the women were delirious.

Who can blame them, right? When we are honest with ourselves we would have to admit that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is something we believe but it is impossible to explain. We call it faith because what we celebrate today is not just the resuscitation of a body that was officially declared dead three days ago. This story has far greater implications. What we celebrate today (in faith) is the fact that his resurrection is connected to the claim that God can enter human history with the sole purpose of creating an entirely new reality.

And God did just that . . . God broke through everything we knew about life and death and dramatically threw us off balance. God is telling us that life is more powerful than death. God is telling us that love is more enduring than a tragic death on the cross. And every Easter Sunday we give thanks to God for the gift of faith that allows us not to comprehend fully the mystery of the resurrection but yet offers hope for those of us who believe that it is true.

I stand before you now to tell you that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most critical element in the life of a believer. As outlined in all of 1 Corinthians 15, if we do not believe that Christ was raised from the dead then we are in a whole lot of trouble because we are still dead to our sins. If we do not believe that Christ was raised from the dead then our faith in God is nothing more than wishful thinking and there is no substance to our faith.

We all know it because some days all we have to cling to is our faith.

When the odds are against us we have the promise that God is with us. God never leaves us alone. After Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples and ascended into heaven God sent the gift of his Holy Spirit to be with us. Our new reality is that we will never be separated from the love of God that we know through his Son, Jesus Christ.

God proved to us today that God has a future in store for each of us because the new reality is that with God all things are possible. No matter what we face in life, no matter how dark the night becomes, no matter how long it has been since we have paid attention to God our faith is not in vain. No matter how bad we feel, no matter how many times someone has told us that it is not possible, our faith is not in vain because God has raised Jesus from the dead.

And if God has raised Jesus from the dead then surely God is able to work all things for our good. God will continue to give exceedingly and more abundantly more than we can ever ask. And it is to that we chant – *Praise the Lord! Alleluia! We know it to be true!*

On this day we put aside our fears in order to serve a risen Christ. Death has been defeated, all enemies are under his feet, his hands are no longer tied, and he cannot be stopped by the presence of evil. On this day we are no longer in our sins and sin will no longer stain our souls. On this day we celebrate that because Christ lives we are a new creation that starts with his resurrection and continues until God opens up a new heaven and a new earth.

This is not an idle tale! This is not utter nonsense! We live today in our new reality created by God through Christ. We can let our hearts overflow with joy! We can proclaim with confidence that this is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it for Christ is alive! Christ has been raised! We knew it! It happened just like Jesus said it would. Amen