

March 27, 2016  
Sermon for Easter Sunday  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Luke 24:1-12

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Luke 24:1–12 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” <sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, <sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

It's easy to get overwhelmed at Easter with the lilies, the praise, the celebration of Christ's victory, not to mention the family activities of getting together and rushing because many have to work the next day. It's easy to get overwhelmed.

But when you listen to Luke tell the Easter story, he focuses your attention on one thing. Remembering, which goes on far past the events of one day.

Think of it. The first Easter was a swirl of activity and emotion. Women come to the tomb with spices and find that the tomb is open and the body of Jesus is gone. They come across men who dress like lightning. And when these men talk, they know what these women are doing: "*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*" They know what has happened: "*He is not here, but has risen!*" and they even know what has been done and said in their past: "*Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise*" (Luke 24:5–6).

These men know these women even though the women have never seen them before in their lives. And in the midst of all of this commotion, what does Luke focus our attention upon?

Luke, when he puts it all together, calls our attention to one simple act: "*They remembered His words*" (v. 8).

That's what Luke wants us to know this morning as we celebrate Easter.

On that first Easter morning, when Jesus rose from the dead, in the midst of the wonder, the fear, and the worship, His people simply and faithfully did one single thing: *“They remembered His words.”*

God on Easter morning sent angels to the tomb to help His people remember, and this morning through His Word He helps us to remember as well. God has made the empty tomb a place of remembering for us this morning in order that we might truly rejoice in what Christ does for us on Easter.

But what kind of remembering is this? You see, memory does many things. Have you ever noticed how a person, friend or foe, can come into your life and with a few simple words change everything?

They simply say, “I remember when you used to . . .” or “Do you remember when . . .” And in that remembering, things begin to change. That’s the power of memory. But how do things change?

This morning, I would like to consider two ways in which remembering changes our lives.

On the one hand, remembering can take us away from our present and lead us to a world that is past. We often encounter this at funerals.

Members of the family gather by the casket and someone comes and simply begins to remember. “I remember when people would come over, he’d love to tell his fishing stories.” “Yeah,” says another, “and he never talked about the one that got away. Nope. He always caught the big ones.” “Got bigger each year.” “In the end, they got so big you couldn’t take pictures.”

And soon, you see these people taken away from the present to another place, a place where shoulders relax, and weary faces brighten, and you can hear laughter . . . even at a funeral.

Such is the power of remembering. It can take you away from the present. On the other hand, there is another kind of remembering that does not take you away from the present but brings you more fully into it. You see this type of remembering all the time with grandparents.

The day they hold their first grandchild. You bring your daughter and place her in your mother's arms. At first, grandma is nervous. It's been so long since she held a baby. She holds the child awkwardly. Afraid she will hurt her. But after a moment, she remembers what this was like. She cradles the child's head, rocks her, whispers silly things to her. She leans down and kisses her forehead and then looks up and begins to talk about what it was like when you were young.

This time, memory is not taking your mother away from the present. It is bringing her more fully into it. Through memory, she is able to delight in the joy of holding her granddaughter in her arms.

Two types of remembering, then: that which takes you away from the present and that which brings you more fully into it.

The question I have for you this morning is what kind of remembering happens at Easter?

What happens when God comes among us today and, through His Word, helps us remember?

Does He take us away from our present or bring us more fully into it? For these women, remembering the Lord's words brings them more fully into the present. With the words of Jesus, they begin to understand the strange new world that surrounds them.

Empty graves and men who dress like lightning. Angels who have been with you all of your life. These things make sense: Jesus had talked about a heavenly kingdom. The world is God's, and God's kingdom has come.

What about the pain of the crucifixion? Was this all a mistake? No, Jesus had told them: His betrayal and death were part of God's will. God so desired to save all people that He gave His only Son to bear the punishment for their sin. And now, punishment is gone. Divine vengeance is over, and the open grave gives a glimpse of heavenly joy. Angels talk to humans. Humans speak to one another, sharing a message that saves every man, woman, and child.

"God loves you. In love, He gave His life for you. And now He lives and reigns eternally your God." Suddenly, life for these women has become worth living, and they run from the tomb to live fully in His grace.

Remembering, therefore, can bring us more fully into the present. But our world will tell you differently. Our culture shakes its head at us Christians.

When we remember Easter, our culture acts as if we have entered the realm of the imagination and lost touch with the present. "A Savior rising from the dead? A world filled with sin and the devil and angels and demons? That's a world with outmoded morality and strange views of creation and answers to questions that people no longer ask," they say.

“Too much of this and you will no longer be able to function. You won’t be able to enjoy the good life. You will not get ahead in business if you try that ‘love your neighbor’ kind of stuff.”

That’s the world’s reaction. But this morning, we’ve learned that God’s ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. When He causes us to remember the resurrection, He does not take us away from this world and lock us up in some religious belief system that has no connection to the present.

No, God sets us free to experience life today in His kingdom with deeper meaning.

Today, the Church remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus because this event makes life in this world richer and full of meaning. All of us have sins in our past that make us fearful about going on. Anger at your boss has fractured your working relationship. Gossip about co-workers has made friends your enemies. Ending an unwanted pregnancy began a life of horrible regret.

A broken marriage, a broken childhood, a broken relationship with God. These things come to mind, and we are uncertain how we can move on. It seems as if our past has destroyed our future. But God comes today and speaks to us. He says, “Remember My Son. Jesus. He gave His life for you. Your sins are forgiven. He has risen and rules and is now the author of life. Through Him, you are a child of My kingdom. In Him, you are a member of My family. With Him, your life is now part of My work in history.”

When God makes His love known in Jesus, we are freed from our sins and live in God’s kingdom. Christ has risen. He has defeated death. He has overcome sin.

He is the author of life. Now and forever. And when Jesus is the author of your life, every day deepens in meaning.

Some people think that in order to have a vibrant Christianity, the Church needs to make God relevant. For them, God is some distant power, some deity who is far away, buried in ancient-sounding names in ancient-looking manuscripts.

The Church, they say, needs to bring this God into the twenty-first century. It needs to make Him relevant for people. For them, the Church should identify the needs of the people and then look through the Scriptures to see what they can find about God that fits those needs. If the world has people who need better self-esteem, then the Church should look through the Bible and find a Jesus who can give us principles for personal development.

If people need a prayer life, then the church should produce a Jesus who has a five-step method for prayer. Jesus becomes an ever-changing figure, the latest god to hit the market, always offering people what they need. And this somehow makes God relevant. I wonder about these people, because I think they have misunderstood the ways of our God.

God does not need to make Himself relevant to people. He's God, after all. He rules all things. What God does, however, is make people relevant to Him. That's God's gracious work. He makes your life relevant to Him and to His kingdom.

Did you notice in the Gospel that Luke stops in the middle of the story to give us the names of these women?

Luke writes, “Returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles” (vv. 9–11). Luke stops in the middle of the story to give us their names because these women have suddenly become something. They have become witnesses to the working of God. They went to the tomb as mourners, but now they come back as witnesses. They have names and a life experience and a story to tell. Because?

When God graciously intervenes and brings people into His kingdom, He makes their lives relevant. People are relevant not because of anything in them or anything done by them but simply because they are God’s and they live in God’s world and God has a strange way of pouring out all that He has for the sake of reaching out to His world. Daily business is more than business: it is a vocation. That difficult conversation you have with your daughter is an occasion for graceful speech. The fragile moments of our lives are filled with a meaning beyond our making and a love beyond our strength. Our lives are in the hands of God, and there, in His hands, we become part of the way God is at work in the world. For us, as for these women, life becomes more meaningful because Christ has risen and sends us forth to live in His world by His grace.

Today, Luke proclaims the resurrection and asks us to remember. Remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Him, you are forgiven. By Him, you have new life. With Him, your life is part of His unfolding kingdom. Yes, it is easy to get overwhelmed at Easter. Because:

That’s because this love of God . . . it’s overwhelming.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds  
through Christ Jesus!

Amen.