

Sermon on Luke 24:1-12  
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010  
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer  
By James Erlandson

There are a few things in life that we humans count on as being certain. When you look up, you see the sky. When you look down, you see the ground. If you do not eat, you will starve. If you do not drink water, you will die of thirst. If you go in the water and can't swim, you will drown. If you and I live long enough, we will grow old. And one day we will die. These things are for certain. There are other things that are certain as well, and other things that are not. But these things are for sure. And when you're dead, you're dead. Everybody knows this.

But...today we have a counter message to this, a new reality declared by God that goes counter to everything that we human beings know is true. For on the first day of the week, the third day after Jesus had been crucified, when everyone who knew Jesus had gone to sleep certain that Jesus was dead, gone, and buried...three women, who had been with Jesus all the way from Galilee to the end of his ordeal on the cross, went to the tomb in the early morning. They had come to Jesus' grave with spices to anoint his body, knowing that he was dead. They were in grief, mourning the tragic, brutal execution of their teacher and friend at the hands of the Romans, but they were sure that he was dead. Nobody questioned it. They had only come to care for his body, as was their custom.

But then they found something unexpected and very strange: the stone which stood in the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. When they went inside to see, they did not find Jesus' body. They were very perplexed about this. And suddenly they saw two men dressed in dazzling white standing beside them. Terrified, they bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "*Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you..that he would be crucified, and on the third day rise...*" They remembered, and ran to tell the others who were hiding in fear back at home.

Today you and I have heard the proclamation of God through his angel messengers and the witnesses to the resurrection, that what we know to be true beyond a doubt – that one who has died remains dead, and cannot become alive again – can now be called into question. *For Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* God has inserted a new reality into our human existence, that even when we die, this is not the end. You and I can expect a new ending, a new life beyond our death, because of faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. And this is the most amazing news that has ever been offered in contradiction to all that we humans have ever known to be true.

Did you hear how many “buts” Luke inserted into the Easter gospel? It seems like every time humans seemed sure of something, God provided another way, with the word “but”. Jesus had been buried in his tomb; Mary and the other women from Galilee had anointed his body with ointments and spices, and on the Sabbath they had rested – **but** on the first day of the week they had returned to the tomb with more spices. They had found the stone rolled away, **but** when they went inside they didn’t see Jesus’ body. They were terrified to see two men in dazzling clothes appear, **but** these messengers didn’t hurt them – they simply asked “why do you seek the living among the dead?” Why do you seek Jesus in a cemetery? They ran from the tomb to tell the others, **but the disciples** thought their words were only an idle tale – they didn’t believe them. **But** even so, Peter got up and ran to the tomb, looked inside and saw the linen clothes by themselves as the women had said, and went home, amazed at what had happened.

All these things that humans were so sure of being true, but God had a different truth to tell. In fact, God had a great surprise in store! The one who was so surely dead was now alive! This news that seemed so fantastic seemed only to be the idle talk of women to those hard-headed, slow-witted male disciples! But even when the women’s story seemed so unbelievable to them all, Peter was still moved enough by hope to go to the tomb to take a look for himself. Could it possibly be that Mary’s story was true? Could it possibly be that God could have raised Jesus from the dead? No.....it was impossible! So why, then, did Peter go? It wasn’t because he believed – he didn’t. He had even denied knowing Jesus when the chips were down. But he still went to see the empty tomb....because the news the women told gave him **hope**. What if it were true? What if it were possible, all that Jesus had said and taught them. It was certainly worth a look!

So Peter went. And today, you and I have come, like Peter, to take our own look at the fantastic story of an empty tomb, because of the **hope it gives to us!** What if all that the Church has proclaimed for 2000 years is true, that God raised Jesus from the dead?! What if what our Sunday school teachers told us when we were little, and the pastor keeps preaching Sunday after Sunday, year after year, is true? Doesn’t that *change everything* that you and I keep hearing is true in our own lives? That one day we are all going to die, and that’s it. That the world is all going to hell in a hand basket, we’re all doomed, and everything is getting worse, so what’s the point in believing in anything or anyone, because we’ll only be let down and disappointed. That’s what we’re led to believe in this world.

But God has a much different message. It doesn’t have to be that way, in fact, it’s not! *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* We didn’t know that we had another choice. We thought we were all doomed to die without any hope of an alternate ending. But God has other ideas. And God has made a new ending possible for all of us, through faith in the one whom God has raised to life.

*For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

I know it sounds too good to be true. But you and I are here, aren't we? Do you know *why* you are here? I don't presume that it is because you are already assured in your belief. Because the story seems so fantastic, doesn't it! It sounds too good to be true, like some old miracle story from the Sunday School of your youth, when your mom or dad or that nice teacher told you stories that made you happy to believe! So maybe you've come to hear it again, to reminisce? Or maybe you've come like Peter did, because you heard this story that seemed too good to be true, yet you want to believe it, and so you have come to be with others who believe it, if only for a day, to *imagine* what it is like to believe that what Jesus said has come true. Isn't that why all of us have come? To hear the story once again with other believers, to reinforce in ourselves the hope that we have in this good news of God, which gives us a whole new lease on life?

The disciples and the women of the story had hope once. They had hoped in this new teacher who taught them so much about life and about God, who gave them hope in a new way of living. They thought that it would all happen in their lifetime, that through Jesus, God would create a new kingdom on earth. And then their worst nightmare came true. Jesus' enemies accused him, one of their own had betrayed him, he had been arrested, tried, and executed by the Romans. It seemed that their hopes had been dashed, that their dream was over. They had even buried his body in the ground. But then the women went to the tomb, and messengers were there with another story, that Jesus was not there, but risen. *Then they remembered what Jesus had told them*, and all of a sudden, everything fit together. It was real after all, it was just happening in a much different way than they had expected it. And so it can be for you and me. *Faith in the resurrection can make everything in our own lives turn out completely different than we ever imagined, when we believe....because of God's power to change everything!*

So on this Easter day, let hope take charge in your life! Don't let the dismal truth of everything you are told in life keep you from hearing the story. This is the day to remember what Jesus told *us*, that the future is not confined to our human limitations, even our mortality! When things seem to go against you, remember that this is not the end of the story, that God gives you many future possibilities. When you are sick, or your loved ones are seriously ill, remember that your existence is not defined only by your physical health or the prognosis! You are not your sickness, you are a *child of God, who raises the dead!* Though you may have lost a loved one, a parent, a spouse, a child or friend, your grief is not final, for they, too, will rise again! And though it is true that we shall one day all die, today we have heard a new and greater truth: that you and I shall also rise again to be with the Lord and our loved ones for eternity. For this reason we sing our praise to God this day: *For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.*