

April 21, 2019 – Luke 24:1-12 (Easter)

M.I.A. Missing in action. It's a common enough term. We might say it flippantly about a coworker who's late for their shift. Or a family member who doesn't show up for worship this morning. Or any number of everyday circumstances when someone isn't where they're supposed to be.

But if you're a member of the military or a veteran or the family of a serviceman or woman, the phrase 'Missing in Action' means a lot more. And in a military context, it's not something you would say lightly. M.I.A. is a deadly serious thing.

Because you don't know what has happened to them. They could be just fine and temporarily separated from the rest of their unit. They could be stranded or lost or injured on the battlefield. They could be taken prisoner by the enemy. Or they could be dead. You just don't know.

And not knowing in that circumstance has to be horrible. Because you want to hold out hope. But you can't help preparing yourself for the worst. And all you can do is wait. And wonder what happened.

For the women and disciples on Easter morning, I have to think that's what's going through their minds. Not at first, of course. The women went to the tomb expecting to find that Jesus was not M.I.A. He was K.I.A.

Killed in action. They had watched it happen with their own eyes just two days prior. Watched as the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. Watched as he breathed his last breath. Watched as a spear was pushed into his side. Watched as they pulled him down off the cross.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that he was dead. He had lost pint after pint of blood. He had stopped breathing. He had vital organs punctured by the spear. The body that they wrapped in linen and laid in the tomb was completely lifeless.

Killed in action, in God's continuing war against sin, death, and the devil. Killed in action, by those opposed to the Kingdom of God and Jesus' rule over heaven and earth. Killed. Dead. Finished.

But when the women arrive at the tomb, Jesus' status changed. From killed in action to missing in action. Where is he? What in the world is going on here? Their minds are filled with uncertainty and they have to assume the worst.

So the angels spell it out for them. "He has risen! He's alive! Rejoice!" OK? Then where is he? Why isn't he here? Why do his closest friends and followers get nothing more than an empty tomb and pile of bloody linen?

Why isn't Jesus standing right in front of them at this very moment? Calming all of their fears. Does he have somewhere better to be? A prior engagement? Sorry I'm late. I was dead. You know how it is.

Seriously. Why? This is the resurrection. Scripture says that literally all of creation has been waiting for this moment. Certainly, his disciples would like to be celebrating this moment with him. But Jesus makes them wait. Why?

Well, the angels explain part of that to the women at the tomb. "*Why do you seek the living among the dead,*" they ask. "*He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still 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.*"

Remember how he told you. This was already explained to you. He already prepared you for this moment. Why are you confused? Why are you afraid? Why are you bringing spices to prepare a dead body?

Isn't his Word enough for you? Aren't his promises enough for you? You followed this man for 3 years because you trusted him. You believed in him. So trust him and believe in him one more time.

And the angels were right. Jesus had kept his death and resurrection no secret. He spelled it out for them over and over again. They should have expected this. But even so, why hide from them? This is the time for Jesus to be basking in the glory of the resurrection, right?

Or is it? Jesus didn't think it was. He tells the disciples on the road to Emmaus that it was when he suffered all these things that he entered into his glory. He says the same thing while he's praying in John's Gospel. Just before he's arrested, Jesus calls the events of his Passion and crucifixion the time when the Father will glorify him.

Simply put, Jesus didn't see his resurrection as his moment of glory. He saw his death as his moment of glory. That bloody, awful, gruesome execution on a cross. That was the glory of God.

Because his resurrection was kinda predictable, when you really think about it. I mean, defeating sin, death, and the devil is a big thing to us. But to Jesus? To the Son of God? It's really not that big a deal.

He's already done it plenty of times. Jesus has forgiven the sins of countless people. He's raised three people from the dead, and healed hundreds. And he's cast out legions of demons and beaten Satan's temptations in desert.

Jesus had already defeated sin, death, and the devil throughout his life. That he did it again on Easter morning really should have been expected by the disciples. Once again, remember all he said and did. You should have seen this coming.

But the crucifixion? That was something new. That God almighty would stoop down in humility and become a human being. That he would let himself be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified.

And for what? To show sinful human beings his love. His forgiveness. His mercy and grace. To take upon himself a punishment we deserve. That's mind blowing. That kind of love staggers the imagination.

God owed us nothing. He's the creator of the universe. The ruler of heaven and earth. If he didn't like how humanity turned out, he could have wiped us out of existence and started over. But he didn't. He chose instead to fix the damage we did. So that we might live eternally with him.

That is the glory of God. And that is what Jesus wanted his disciples to remember. That is where he wanted their minds focused. Not, "Look at me! Look at how powerful I am! I beat sin, death, and the devil! Woohoo!"

But instead, "Look at me. Look at my hands and feet and side. Look at how powerful I am. I beat sin, death, and the devil. But I died for you."

We look at Jesus on Easter morning and we think he's M.I.A. Missing in action. But he's not. He couldn't possibly be. Not with the way he loves us. Jesus is never missing in action. Not from his disciples. Not from the women at the tomb. Not from us. He has promised to be with us to the end of the age.

And so he is. He is with us in the water of baptism. He is with us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He is with us in the promises of his Word.

He is never missing from your life. In all your fear and doubt and anxiety. And if you seek him, you will find him. For he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Today, we gather together and look upon an empty tomb. But we don't wonder where Jesus is or what's going on. We know exactly where Jesus is. Because Jesus is exactly where he promised us he would be. Right here, with us.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.