

April 20, 2025 – Luke 24:1-12

The women arrived at early dawn. They had prepared the spices. They knew where the tomb was. They had followed when Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus there. The Sabbath had come and gone. And now it was the first day of the week. And they were still grieving.

Jesus was dead. They saw it. They wept for it. They watched him die on a cross like the common criminals that hung on each side of him. And now they came in the early morning light for the only thing left to do: honor the one they loved. Give him a proper burial. Show their love for their dead teacher.

But as they arrived they discovered that something was terribly wrong. The stone had been rolled away. The body was gone. “Where is Jesus?” That’s the question they’re all asking on Easter morning.

The women didn’t come to find good news. They came to find a grave. To find closure and a time to mourn. And now, even that had been taken away from them. They were confused. They were afraid.

And the appearance of two angels – men in dazzling clothing – didn’t help anything. It just overwhelmed them even more. As if grief weren’t bad enough, now this: a missing body and strange messengers from heaven. “*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*” the angels ask. “*He is not here.*”

He is not here. I wonder how comforting those words really were to the women. OK, he’s not here. Then where is he? For those women hearing this news for the first time, for the apostles that they told, for the many other disciples of Jesus like the two of the road to Emmaus, this was surprisingly not received as good news. It was simply confusing and frightening.

That same confusion and fear is sometimes still present with us today. Because I bet you’ve asked the same question. Maybe not out loud. But you’ve asked it with your tears, your prayers, with your silent doubts and worries.

When the diagnosis comes back terminal: “Where is Jesus?” When your child walks away from the faith: “Where is Jesus?” When your marriage starts to crumble, when the bills pile up, when the depression won’t lift: “Where is Jesus?”

When there’s violence on the news, when churches shrink, when prayers go unanswered: “Where is Jesus?” When you sit at the bedside of someone who is dying and all you can hear is their labored breathing getting shallower and shallower: “Where is Jesus?”

At those moments, you start to wonder. At those moments, all you know is that He is “not here.” And that’s all there is to say.

But that’s not what the angels mean. That’s not what they say. And that’s not what Easter proclaims. Because “He is not here” does not mean that He is absent. “*He is not here,*” the angel says, “*but has risen!*” And that changes everything.

The body wasn’t stolen, after all. Nor did Jesus didn’t simply vanish. He rose. The Son of God who was crucified has conquered death. And now, because He is not in the tomb, He is with us. He is “not here” in the tomb,” because he is “now here,” in so many ways.

He is now here in His gifts. He is now here in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. He is now here in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Table. He is now here in the preaching of the Gospel. He is now here in this church, where two or three are gathered in His name.

You wanna know where Jesus is? He tells you over and over again. “*This is My body... This is My blood... given for you.*” “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.*” “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

These verses sound so poetic, but they're not just poetry. They're a promise. They're not just symbolism. They're substance. They're not just wishful thinking. They're our Easter reality.

The same Jesus who died for you, lives for you. And He gives Himself to you, right here, right now, this very day. He is now here, even when the world still looks broken.

Because, the resurrection doesn't undo every earthly sorrow. The women still wept. The disciples still ran and hid. Life still hurts. But now, everything is different. Now, your pain isn't the end of the story. Now, your sorrow has a Savior who walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came out the other side.

So he is now here in everything. He is now here in the doctor's office. He is now here in the bills, the worrying, and the sleepless nights. He is now here in the grieving, the prayers, the waiting. He is now here, not because you feel Him, but because He promises to be.

Let that sink in. Our culture loves to measure everything based on our emotions and our personal experiences. We're told they are the single most important truth. But Jesus' presence is not measured by your emotions. His nearness is not confirmed by your experiences. He does not wait for your heart to feel warm and fuzzy, or your soul to feel strong and brave, before showing up.

You may feel empty, but He is still here. You may feel lost, but He is still here. You may feel nothing at all, but He is still here. Because His presence doesn't depend on your feelings. It depends on His Word.

And His Word is certain. He said, *"I am with you always."* So he is with you always. He said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* So he will never leave you nor forsake you. He said, *"This is My body... This is My blood... given for you."* So this is his body and his blood, given for you. He said, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."* So you are truly his disciples, because you are hearing his word today.

When your heart wavers, return to what He says. When your emotions overwhelm you, return to what He gives. When you feel far from God, know that He is not far from you.

This is the glory of the resurrection. Not that you must go to God, but that God has come to you. The tomb is empty. He is not there. But He is now here, with you, for you, in Word and Sacrament. He is not a memory. He is not a symbol. He is not a feeling. He is your Risen Lord. And He is now here.

He is now here especially when death comes. Because that's the greatest enemy. That's when we need him the most. *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* Paul says. But Christ has already struck the fatal blow. He truly died. And He truly rose.

Which means when you die, your grave will also be empty someday. Your body will rise. You will live. Not in fear, not in weakness, but in the victory of the Risen Christ.

That's where this all ends. Not in a tomb, but in a garden of life. Isaiah foresaw it in our Old Testament Lesson: *"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth... They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain."* Christ has made all things new. And He begins with you.

In your sorrow, He is now here with comfort. In your questions, He is now here with His Word. In your sin, He is now here with forgiveness. In your death, He is now here with new life.

Don't look for the living among the dead. He is not there. He is risen. He is now here. Just as he said. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.