

**The Resurrection of Our Lord – April 20, 2025 (C)**  
Luke 24:1-12

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Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed, alleluia!)  
Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

The theme of these past three days, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and now Easter (which began last night at the vigil), is life, death, and resurrection. We started on Thursday with Jesus preparing his disciples for life—new life that he was about to make possible for them and for all people through his death and resurrection, a different kind of life, one characterized by humility, forgiveness, and love, a life freed from the powers of sin, death, and evil. With that goal in mind as the destination that Jesus is leading us to, we plunged into the pain and darkness of Good Friday, following our Lord to the cross, and pondering its deep significance for us and for the life of the world. Last night we sat vigil in the darkness with candles lit from a new fire, hearing again the stories of the people of God, from the creation of the world to the exile in Babylon. Then we gathered around the font to remember and reaffirm our new life in Holy Baptism. And then we brought up the lights to celebrate the first communion service Easter.

To help us on this journey, we've been going back and forth for the past three days between the Gospels according to John and Luke. Each of them tells the story a little differently, with different emphases. On Thursday the vision of life that Jesus gave his disciples before his crucifixion was from John. The focus was on the community of Jesus' disciples and their life together as witnesses to Jesus. This morning we return to Luke, where the vision is more global. If you think back to Advent, you'll remember that Luke devotes his first chapter to the story of two women, Elizabeth and Mary, who both embody and proclaim a vision of the world turned upside down by the coming of Jesus. In Jesus, Luke tells us, God means to overturn our present arrangement of value and power, which works to benefit some at the expense of others. Mary's famous song, the Magnificat, lays that out for us. God casts down might and lifts up the lowly. God feeds the hungry and sends the rich away empty. God scatters the proud in their conceit and has mercy on those who look to God for help. The ultimate point in both Luke and John is this: the life that Jesus has come to make possible is not merely a restoration or reanimation of business as usual. This is about a new reality, a new creation.

There are a few things to notice in Luke's telling of the resurrection this morning that help to further that point. The first is the state of mind of the women who come to the tomb. This is conveyed by this line in verse five: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" It's my favorite line from Luke's telling of the resurrection. It is the question asked by the men in shiny clothes to the women who had come to anoint Jesus' body. "Why did you come to a *tomb* looking for Jesus?" they ask the women. What they mean is that tombs are for dead people. "You expected Jesus to be dead, didn't you? Well, guess what – he's not here. He is risen!" Of course they expected Jesus to be dead in the tomb. That's why they brought the spices and ointments that they had prepared on the night of Jesus' death. Dead people don't come back to life. And Jesus had died. They saw it with their own eyes. They saw him laid in the tomb. He was dead.

The next thing to notice is the next verse. "Remember how he told you...?" But here I want us to notice the significance of whom these words are spoken to. These mysterious men in dazzling apparel expect the women to remember Jesus' teaching. They are treating them as if they were disciples. Which of course they were. Women disciples? Yes! Remember Mary sitting at Jesus feet, the place of a disciple? We had that reading a couple of weeks ago, and I made sure to point out that Mary was paying attention, that she out of all the disciples was the one who

knew that Jesus was going to his death. That part she got. But she did not yet believe that he would rise again. Now, in the context of the culture of this time and place, the very idea that a woman could be a disciple of God's Messiah was radical. All four Gospels have women at the tomb serving as the first witnesses of the resurrection. But Luke and John, each in their own way, make the most of this, emphasizing the role these women played. This is a brief glimpse of the new and different kind of life that God's kingdom is bringing, the new way of living that Jesus intended for his disciples when he gave them the example of humility, forgiveness, and love for one another on the night of his betrayal. Unfortunately already in the early history of the church, this vision was quickly obscured. The culture reasserted itself and women were put back in "their place." And so for most of the church's history we have failed to appreciate the counter-cultural implications of the gospel for full inclusion of women in the life of the church. And we have done so to the detriment and impoverishment of our gospel proclamation.

The final thing to notice in our Gospel reading is that the news of the resurrection is hard to believe. The women go back to the other disciples, who are all men, with news of the resurrection. And they are not believed. The men thought it was an "idle tale." They have to go and check things out for themselves, and only then are they open to the possibility. Shades of things to come, because while many will believe the message of the gospel that they will later proclaim, many others will not. And here again the importance of humility, forgiveness, and love is raised. I wonder if the men apologized to the women for not believing them after they returned from the empty tomb. I hope so. I wish Luke had told us that they did. What a lovely living out of Jesus' teaching that would have been. And then the women would say, "Yeah, to be fair, we didn't believe Jesus either. We were going to anoint his dead body." And then they would laugh, give thanks to God, and carry that humility, forgiveness, and love out into the world in their witness to the new thing that Jesus is doing in the world.

The takeaway for us from all of this is that the sequence of life, death, and resurrection that characterizes these Great Three Days of the church year is not a "there and back again" kind of story. Resurrection is not a return to normal, to life as it was before. It is something much more radical than that. Jesus' resurrection from the dead signifies the defeat of the powers of sin, death, and evil that wield such great influence over the way the world works. It is a renunciation of the powers of this world that rebel against God, and of their seductive ways of sin that draw us from God. We do well to remember that now at a time when Christian identity is being twisted into the opposite of Jesus' message, when God's work of new creation is being rejected, *in Jesus' name* (!) in favor of the very same ideology that put him to death. In place of the humility, forgiveness, and love that Jesus taught and embodied, we are offered arrogance, retribution, and the illusion of might being right. But the news of Jesus' conquering of sin, death, and evil by his death and resurrection is a different message. It is meant to open our eyes to the new thing that God is doing in the face of all our efforts to the contrary. God in Jesus Christ is working a new creation with new values and a new understanding of power and authority. May God grant us grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, to trust that vision and take it to heart, even and especially at times like these. May we with humility and love follow our Lord into his new creation that is even now breaking out all around us. And may we show forth from the depth of our being our trust in the world-changing promise that Christ is risen, Alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)