

Sermon Text – Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25; 2nd Reading: Acts 10:36-43

Scripture for Message: Luke 24:1-12 “He Told Us”

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Too often we come to the empty tomb, and, like Peter, we walk away wondering what all of this means. How do we hold on to hope when looking at the empty tomb? The reading of this scripture from Luke leaves out the part where the women encounter the risen Christ, it leaves out the part where Christ appears to the disciples in the upper room. We’ll get to that, but the reading today leaves us at the empty tomb – wondering.

Think about this, these women had to wait out the sabbath before they could go and care for the body of Christ. I think while they waited for the dawn, they also reminisced about the adventures they had with Jesus whom they now mourn. They probably shared the memories of when they first met, the things they did as they journeyed with Jesus. Mary, Jesus’ mother, might have shared stories of Jesus’ childhood while Mary Magdala recalled the time that he cast out the demons tormenting her.

I imagine they shared stories of the things Jesus taught them, the miracles that they witnessed – their own experiences of healing, preaching, and teaching. That is what we do in our culture when we gather for memorial services and funerals – we share stories, and we talk about our loved ones now gone. It is how we honor their memory, telling their stories, and it is part of the grieving process. They surely grieved the loss of their friend, their teacher – Jesus. None of that would be unusual.

Because Jesus died on the eve of Sabbath, his body was laid to rest in haste – no time to properly prepare and care for burial, so the women early that morning “took the spices they prepared and went to the tomb.” I imagine they had plans to wash his body, comb out his hair and beard, and use the oils and spices according to their traditions – much like we do today, making the body presentable for the final rest. However, when they got to the tomb the stone was rolled away and he was not there, Luke does not tell us how that happened and does not tell us what happened to the Roman guards. The women were scared and confused, so they stood at the empty tomb, and they wondered.

What the two “men” said to them is important – “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” Jesus told them three times what would happen – he told them exactly what they could expect. Then they remembered his words – they remembered and believed.

It's interesting to me that it took a frightening sight of two men in gleaming white suddenly appearing and reminding them of Jesus’ words before they could

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understand. On that long sabbath day, before they could go out to anoint Jesus' body, did they not recall the most important and amazing things he told them? Maybe they only partially listened to him when he told them about his suffering, death, and resurrection thinking it too fantastic a story. I wonder if they recalled the words from Isaiah that were read this morning, the words that describe new heavens and a new earth on that day on God's holy mountain and thought Jesus was telling them about "that day." Maybe they pushed it out of their minds because something like that would never happen, they would never let something like that happen – but they did didn't they and he told them so.

Of course, we know that the men didn't believe the women – because their words seemed like nonsense, they too failed to remember what Jesus told them. Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself and then went away wondering what had happened. If Jesus wasn't in the tomb, where was he – if he is truly alive why had he not come to be with his closest friends and family? He's not there – what were they supposed to do now?

I think that if this were happening today, we would wonder. We have the benefit of two-thousand-years hindsight – we know the rest of the story but sometimes we stand at that empty tomb and wonder. Sometimes we forget the words Jesus spoke those times when he told his followers what would happen. He told us that many would fall away because of the cross. We tell ourselves "No, that would never happen, we'd never let that happen" but we do don't we – we fall away from Jesus even though he told us.

He told us, many of Jesus' stories led to his telling the disciples what was coming. That the "Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22) Actually Jesus told them, three times what would transpire, they listened but did not hear. Jesus' death and resurrection was foreshadowed as well by what was happening around him. The restoration of life to Lazarus, the transfiguration, and his baptism were illustrations of what he told us. Not only did he tell us, but he also showed us.

This day is focused on wondering and remembering what he told us. We hear familiar stories, and we remember. We come to the table of remembrance to partake of Jesus' body and blood – remembering the sacrifice, remembering the suffering, and remembering what he told us. I am sure that when all of what transpired sinks in, the women and Peter will remember and rejoice. They will celebrate what we have come to celebrate this morning – He is risen, and he lives! We serve a risen savior, we need not stand at an empty tomb and wonder, we can hope because we can remember what he told us.

But – we do wonder, as we peer into that empty tomb we wonder, what now. Do we lose our hope by looking at the folded linens in that empty tomb?

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Today we rejoice and celebrate but there is life beyond Easter Sunday – do we remember how Jesus taught us to live? We will come back to hear more of Jesus stories, more illustrations of the lessons he taught but will we remember what he told us when we leave here. Do we remember Jesus the rest of the week or do we walk away wondering to ourselves?

You know – our Christian religion is based on remembering what he told us. The foundations of our faith come out of what the people of God remember. The Old Testament books are recollections of the people, oral traditions, and the passing along of what they remembered, what the prophets told them and what they themselves experienced. Eventually these oral traditions were written down and the stories became for us sacred scripture. Our New Testament books, the Gospels, Paul's letters, and other writings are compilations of what witnesses remembered from what he told them, what they witnessed and experienced. That is what the Christian experience is, an experience of remembering what he told us.

We remember God's promises and we come to our faith in that remembering. We remember what Jesus did for us and that remembering strengthens our faith, remembering gives us hope. When we come to difficulties and trials in our lives, we remember what he told us. He told us there would be suffering, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. He told us that his followers would suffer persecution and many would fall away. In the same way he told us that he would not leave us as orphans but would come to us – leaving us an advocate to help and be with us forever.

He told us so, yet there is wonder and amazement. What happens now because when we focus on the emptiness our hope falters? We wonder about life and the moments when it feels like we are alone – even though he told us that he would never leave us alone. We can put ourselves in the place of those women as they prepared that morning to care for the body of Christ. How do we prepare to care for the body of Christ? We come to church on this Easter Sunday morning, we come prepared to sing our alleluias and hymns of joy, we might think that is what Easter is all about. We come focused not on the cross but on what we have planned for the rest of the day. We come to fulfill an obligation making an appearance and hoping that God and Jesus will notice. OR – maybe we are hoping to blend in with the Easter crowd and sneak in and out unnoticed.

The scriptures we read this morning leave us peering into an empty tomb and wondering – unfortunately, some of us have a tough time remembering what he told us. We have a tough time because what isn't in our scriptures this morning are the reminders to listen and while listening, hear what he told us. Jesus has told us how to care for the body of Christ. Jesus has told us what to expect; have we heard what he told us? Do we remember the promises and hold

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on to the hope that comes from remembering what he told us? Don't be stuck in wondering, don't be too amazed at what is going on because he told us.

This morning, after our sending hymn we will have a service of baptism. Baptism is a Christian ritual where we are called to remember what Jesus has done for us – remember what he told us. Long religious tradition proclaims that through baptism we are cleansed of sin; relieved of the burden of guilt; and reminded of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as a blood atonement for the sins of all humanity. Our baptism represents a joining with Christ in his death and resurrection – those are the things we remember on this Easter Sunday. In this vital moment of consecration and covenant God imparts through the Spirit the gifts of grace and we respond with a proclamation of our faith in Jesus as Christ. These are the reasons we gather to sing our alleluias and hymns of praise on this Easter Sunday – he told us what to expect - He is Risen and He lives.