

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Luke 24:1-12

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 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 handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

Oh, my friends, if last Sunday—Palm Sunday—and Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was great, isn’t today absolutely AMAZING! Why, it almost takes my breath away! Jesus was dead. His body was placed in a cold tomb, and the Good News that shocked the world that day was that he had arisen! Christ is risen! And all of God’s people shout, “He is risen, indeed!” Again, Christ is risen! “He is risen indeed!” “Oh death, where is thy victory. Oh death, where is thy sting?” It’s gone because Jesus has conquered death. He rose victorious over the darkness of death. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

A Sunday School teacher had just finished telling her third graders about how Jesus was crucified and placed in a tomb with a great stone sealing the opening. Then, wanting to share the excitement of the resurrection, she asked: “And what do you think were Jesus’ first words when He came bursting out of that tomb alive?” A hand shot up into the air from the rear of the classroom. Attached to it was the arm of a little girl. Leaping out of her chair she shouted out excitedly “I know, I know!” “Good” said the teacher, “Tell us, what were Jesus first words.” And extending her arms high into the air she said: “TA-DA!”

Hopefully, you feel the joy of Easter. Oh, for such excitement about the resurrection to abound in everyone’s heart. It was a glorious day! The events of that marvelous day are recorded in all four Gospels. And as you might expect, there are differences in what is reported. “In Mark, the messenger in the tomb is a young man in a long white robe; in Matthew he is the angel of the Lord.” In Luke, which was the account read for us today it says, “two men in dazzling clothes” were there; and in John, it’s recorded as two angels were there. While there are these differences, the most important fact still remains consistent in all the Gospels: the tomb was empty. Jesus was gone. The resurrection had occurred, just as he said!

It was the day after the Sabbath when the women went to the tomb to anoint and embalm the body of Jesus because there was no time to do it after his death. Placing his body in the tomb that was donated by Joseph of Arimathea and the beginning of the Sabbath made it unacceptable to do the anointing and embalming. When the women arrived at the tomb, we read that they found the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty.

Their reaction to this dilemma is not surprising. It was a perfectly natural and expected response. What could have happened to the body of Jesus? They knew without a doubt that it had been put in the tomb and the heavy stone had been rolled in front of the tomb’s opening. Where

was Jesus? He was dead! He certainly did not get up and walk away. Dead people don't do that! Or did he? It was not a possibility that they had considered.

Then suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes appeared before them., frightening them, and they asked the intriguing question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The men reminded the women of what Jesus had told them before this nightmare had occurred. Jesus told them that three days after his death, he would arise. Didn't they believe him? Before we judge them too harshly, remember that the human experience they knew was that this would not be possible.

They were not alone in their thinking. When the women returned to the disciples who were hiding and told them about their experience, the disciples thought their story was "an idle tale, and they did not believe them." They thought the women were delusional.

But Peter, perhaps feeling hopeful, went to the tomb to see if what the women shared was, indeed, true. Peter had first-hand experience with Jesus' ability to make predictions. Remember the story of how Jesus predicted that Peter would deny knowing him three times after his arrest; and that's exactly what Peter did. Imagine the shame he must have felt after fulfilling that prediction. He wasn't going to let that happen again, at least not without seeing for himself whether the tomb was empty.

We have the story of the resurrection of Christ to read about in the Bible; yet many may think, as well, that it is impossible to believe that Jesus arose; or like Peter, they may wish to go to the tomb to see if it is indeed true that Jesus lives. The question, then, that the men dressed in dazzling clothes asked the women, still confronts many people today: "Why are you looking for Jesus, who is alive, among the dead?"

There are those who refuse to believe that Jesus arose from the dead and that He continues to live among us today. They say they cannot see his physical body and conclude he was a great man, a teacher, even a brave hero who lived a long time ago on this earth—but he died. He is to be remembered. But he is not alive and with us now. True believers know that it takes a faithful heart and eyes to be aware of and see his presence in our lives and in our world today. The faithful ones know Jesus lives—still—today!

Many people believe that Jesus was an exemplary man. His life is one to be honored. So, it is good for us to read about him and study his teachings and use him and his teachings as an example for living a good and upright life. As Christians, we certainly know the value of studying the life and words of Jesus. He set the model of living a selfless life, full of compassion, love, mercy and forgiveness towards others; and we want to follow his example. It takes discipline to do this.

Yet those who are faithful—those who believe in the resurrected Christ—know that the living Christ infuses our souls to make his style of living more potent and more than a discipline. The living Christ moves into our souls, making us naturally more like him, communicating through our words and actions a loving and compassionate service heart like his. Jesus is more than a person to be studied.

No, we are not perfect. We don't always get it right. But Jesus, who lives, helps us. Bible commentator, William Barclay, shares this illustration, which I like, to make this point.

"Some of us when we were young were presented at school with a writing book. At the top it had a line of copperplate writing; below it had blank lines on which we had to copy it. How utterly discouraging were our efforts to reproduce that perfect pattern! But then the teacher would come and, with her hand, would guide our hand over the lines and we got nearer the ideal."

That is exactly what Jesus does for us. He is not only the pattern and example. He helps us, guides us and strengthens us to follow that pattern and example of his life. He is not simply a role model for life; he is a living presence to help us to live.

David Redding tells of having a big, black Scottish shepherd as a pet when he was growing up on a farm in the country. He named the dog Teddy, and they became inseparable companions. Teddy would wait on him to come home from school at the bus stop. Teddy slept at the foot of his bed. Teddy came whenever David whistled a tune. During the night, no one could get within a half mile of their farm without Teddy's permission. The boy and his dog were inseparable.

Then World War II came, and David went away to war. He told his family good-bye, but there was no way to tell a dog you were going away and might never come back.

David Redding went away to boot camp and then was shipped overseas for three years. Finally, the day came when he could go home. The last bus stop was 14 miles from the farm and his parents didn't have a phone. He simply threw his duffle bag over his shoulder and started walking.

It must have been two o'clock in the morning as he neared the farm. It was pitch dark, but he knew every step of the way. Suddenly, the dog heard someone on the road and began to bark. David said, "I whistled only once, and Teddy stopped barking. There was a yelp of recognition, and I knew that a big, black dog was running toward me in the darkness. Almost immediately, he was there and in my arms. He knew me. He recognized me. He loved me. Even after three years, he recognized me and loved me."

Jesus returned from the dead. He waits for the lost and those who once knew him and have drifted away to recognize him. If we look among the dead for Jesus, who is living, we make it impossible for ourselves to recognize his presence among us. We disallow him a place to live in our hearts—to move in and help us on our journey of living a Godly life, to live free of the bondage of sin and free of the emotional fear of death that robs us of the joyous life God has given us, free to love others, just as he did. Jesus arose from the grave, my friends. He is alive! Now and forevermore. Let us celebrate! Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Amen.