

## Easter Sunday 2022 C

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

April 17, 2022

Luke 24:1-12

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

He is risen indeed. We say that so much on Easter Sunday. We just sang, *Jesus Christ Is Risen Today! Alleluia!* Which is a different hymn than *Alleluia! Christ Is Arisen*. Which in turn is different from *Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen!* Then there is *Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!* At the end of worship we will sing *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today! Alleluia!* Which is a different hymn than *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today* without the Alleluia. And of course, there is *Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia*. Past tense. So that's seven Easter hymns that have almost identical names. In just our humble little Lutheran hymnal. Christ is risen. Alleluia. "We get the point!" you might say.

Whether we actually believe it is a different story. It's a big deal if it is true, because it means that death is not ultimate. It means our greatest fear is actually not to be feared. It means we have been hitched to a power greater than death. So we're not going down the drain of death. We're anchored to something that will keep us from succumbing to the vortex of death. That's a big deal, if it's actually true. If we can actually believe it.

But here's the fun thing about Easter: Not everybody believes it. The people in the New Testament who are experiencing it in real time, they don't all believe it. The people in today's gospel don't all believe it. I think that gives those of us who are doubtful or skeptical some room. Room to breathe. Room to be ourselves. Easter Day includes a lot of doubting. Doubting Thomas got that name from Easter!

Now in these original Easter stories, the narrators don't agree on all of the details. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew and Mark say there was one angel. Luke and John say there were *a pair* of angels. How can we judge who is right? In Matthew and John, Jesus actually appears to the women. But in Mark and Luke, Jesus does not appear. Today's Easter story is Luke. There are two angels who talk to the women. But Jesus does not talk to the women. He's not in the story this morning.

But despite differing in some details, the four gospels do all agree on four things. They agree that: (1<sup>st</sup>) The tomb of Jesus was empty. (2<sup>nd</sup>) The empty tomb was first discovered by women. (3<sup>rd</sup>) Specifically among those women was Mary Magdalene. And (4<sup>th</sup>) Angels, or at least one angel, speaks to the women. And this morning, on Easter Sunday 2022, I want to draw your

attention to the interaction between the angels and the women. And, I want to draw your attention to the interaction between the women and the men.

So let's start with what you surely noticed this morning if you noticed anything at all. "*These words seemed to them an idle tale.*" The women are reporting to the male disciples, the twelve. (Eleven now, with Judas Iscariot out.) The men *could* call the women liars. They could call them deluded or insane. But those things would be serious. Instead, the men are dismissive of the women. *Idle tale.*

Idle tale! I had to look that one up. *Lēros* is a Greek word that only occurs once in the Bible. Here in today's Easter gospel. One lexicon translates it as "nonsense." Or another: "twaddle." So what if I said to you: *Christ is risen. Alleluia!* And you said, "Twaddle!" That is exactly what happens in our gospel reading today. Twaddle. Nonsense. It does not even rise to the level of a lie or a delusion. Twaddle. Easter morning according to Luke. Christ is risen! Alleluia! Twaddle! Twaddle! Twaddle! say the apostles. You know the apostles: Peter, Andrew, James, etc. This is Easter morning with them. *Twaddle*, they say; *Nonsense*, they say. So I don't know where you are in your faith and spirituality this Easter morning. But that's where Saint Andrew the Apostle and Saint James the Greater were. Twaddle!

This is the interaction of the women with the men, which you surely noticed when we read the story moments ago. But I would also draw your attention especially to the two angels and the women. It's distinctive. See: in Matthew's gospel, the angel tells the women to go quickly and tell. And the women do go quickly. Go and tell. That's the command of the angel.

In Mark's gospel, the angel tells the women to go and tell. But the women flee and tell no one. They were afraid. That's the last verb in the entire gospel according to Mark. *They feared.*

"Go and tell" was the imperative. In Matthew the women followed through. In Mark the women are too overwhelmed to do as they are told. But this morning, in Luke, the women *did* go and *did* tell, and the apostles, the leadership, responded "Twaddle."

What interests me is that the women were not told to go and tell. They did that but that isn't what the angels told them to do. The angels ask this question: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* I want to ask Luke how should a reader deliver that line. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Is that snarky and condescending? Is it a reprimand? Or is it a patient and gracious question? A question to make you think. What some call a rhetorical question. I wish Luke could tell me. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* It's a good question, and it's the question I hope we will take with us when we leave Dove of Peace today. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* It's a great question that speaks to us in all kinds of life's moments. These women are in the darkest, most dismal kind of place. They are in despair. And what rouses them is not "He is risen, Alleluia!" What rouses them is a rhetorical question. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?*

And then follows the imperative. The angels do not say “Go and tell.” The angels say “remember.” That’s the imperative. And Luke says “they remembered.” The Easter morning summons to the women is not a summons to go and tell. (Although they do go and tell.) They are summoned to remember. And they do.

The women have forgotten. They have forgotten something important. And now they are looking for the living among the dead. The decisive moment in the story today is when the angels call them to remember, and they do. And that’s what I want you to take with you today. When you venture out of here. And you find yourself in the dark space. With difficult people. With the loss of love. The dark space of crushing injustice. The space that is darkest for me, which is the space of being powerless. Or the dark space of illness and pain. Betrayal and abandonment. Because I think most of us will be facing some of that this week, this month, this year. Maybe you even brought along some of that dark space with you to church this morning. That’s okay. That’s exactly what these women brought with them. That’s why you should hear the words of the angels, and take those words with you when you leave today. *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember.*

And these women remembered, and went and told the men, and the men said “Twaddle.” The men had not yet remembered. Jesus was going to remind them himself in later verses, in later stories. But today it’s “Twaddle!” The good news kept moving anyway. The women remembered. They remembered their teacher and friend, Jesus. They remembered his courage, they remembered his commitment, they remembered his promise. They remembered his teaching that life is tough. But God’s love is tougher. Death is powerful. But God’s life is more powerful. They remembered.

In the best of times, one year passes from one Easter to the next. Covid has lasted for over two years, and it’s been three years since we’ve had the kind of Easter at Dove of Peace that I think you need and deserve. Time passes. Stuff happens. Crap happens, to be a little more honest. And we forget. And we end up looking for the living among the dead. It reminds me of another story in Luke’s gospel, a story that only Luke tells us. The story of the bent over woman. Jesus heals her. She’s bent over and she can only see the ground. And in the story, which comes to us in August this year, it’s made clear that this is a spiritual problem, not just a physical problem. When Jesus heals her, he says, “Woman, you are set free.” (In the King James Version, “Woman, thou art loosed.”) Being physically stooped over is like spiritually being in despair or depressed. You can’t find the living among the dead.

But then something happens. And in our Easter gospel today, it is memory. And that’s fitting. I daresay that’s why some people only come to church at Christmas and Easter. To be reminded. And a familiar face, a beloved song, the scent of lilies... simple things help our memories. A word of scripture, a communion wafer are signs can help us remember what we knew. Such as the trust we had when we were children. That fundamental and simple trust which all of us must inevitably lose, but which Easter memory can restore. Or that love we felt when we once knew we were truly loved. Easter memory can restore.

Sunday is the eighth day of the week— the octave— because it is the first day of the week. God rested on the seventh day, but he began creation on the first day. And he begins to re-create on the eighth day. Today is that day.

The women were looking for the living among the dead. They didn't know that until it was pointed out to them. The angels told them to remember, and when they remembered, they were no longer looking for the living among the dead, looking for the right thing in the wrong place. In this hour of worship, you are being reminded of important things, and you are being invited to remember. As were the women of Easter. And this remembering can change how you look and see. It can unbend you. And instead of seeking the living among the dead, you might go forth and look for the true life in the right place. And that's when Easter has truly begun for you, as it has for Mary Magdalene and uncounted others. Easter begins for you. Christ is risen. And that's no twaddle! Amen.