

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: April 17, 2022, Year C Easter Sunday

Text: Luke 24:1-12

Title: An Expansive Life (This is the theme from *Sanctified Art*)

Focus: This story about the women at the empty tomb (The risen Jesus does not appear in this text) is perplexing and hard to fathom. The women at the tomb “remembered” what Jesus told them and went to tell the disciples, who considered it crazy talk. But this “idle tale” is surprising good news and the women and all Jesus’ disciples are invited to discover an “expansive life” with him.

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 24:1-12**

<sup>24:1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>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.

### **For Us, This Day is Not Like Any Other Day**

We began our worship this day with words of joyous proclamation:

#### **Call to Worship**

This day is not like any other day.

**Today we slow down.**

**Today we take it all in.**

**Today we rest in good news.**

This day is not like any other day.

**Today we are singing.**

**Today we are full to the brim.**

**Today joy cannot be contained.**

This day is not like any other day.

**Today the stone was rolled away.**

**Today the women saw the empty grave.**

**Today we know—death does not win.**

This day is not like any other day.  
**Alleluia! Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

We begin with celebration. We are rejoicing. “Today we are singing, we are full to the brim. Today joy cannot be contained.”

If this is truly the tone or the atmosphere and the joy that we bring, then the gospel reading from Luke sounds discordant--That does not fit with this. To use the words of the text, the women are *perplexed* by the empty tomb and *terrified* by the two men in dazzling clothes.

- **What’s different for us or what’s different for the women at the tomb?**

## **We Have Heard this Story Before**

Many of us have heard this story before. Or we have heard or remembered some version of it—some approximation of the Easter story. If we have grown up in the church or joined in Easter worship over the years, then we have heard some version of it many times. So, this story is not new to us. We have heard it again and again. It’s not a surprise to us. We know what’s coming or what to expect.

We know that Good Friday is followed by Easter Sunday.

## **This Was a Surprise for the Women**

But for these women and for others in this story, nothing was familiar or comfortable or predictable. They didn’t know what was going to happen next. They had just witnessed the death of their best friend or of the trusted teacher whom they followed. What were they to do when the one they trusted has died?

Of those who came to the tomb, Luke mentions three by name--Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. Luke also says that there were others with them without saying how many.

These women were among his closest followers. They were his financial supporters. Early in Luke’s Gospel, Luke describes how these women were among those who traveled with Jesus as he went about preaching and healing people. They provided for him out of their own resources—for the time and culture of the first century, these were uncommonly independent (and wealthy) women. At this point in the story, Luke mentions only four of these women by name, but also says that there were many others (Luke 8:1-3). They were deeply invested or connected in the ministry of Jesus, even if they weren’t among “the twelve” disciples.

**And what had they seen and experienced?** They had watched Jesus be abused and suffer and be put to death. Luke tells us they saw the tomb and where

Jesus' body was placed. As the Sabbath approached, they prepared spices and ointment for the preparation of Jesus' body.<sup>1</sup>

This is what they were prepared to finish as they came to the tomb bringing spices to properly prepare his body. So they came, as the Children's Bible story mentioned, with "a job to do." They came to prepare his body.

You know, in our culture, we're inclined to avoid even thinking about death. We behave as though it won't happen—that it won't happen to those whom we love. It's too hard to imagine our own death. We avoid talking about death: we use phrases like "pass away" instead of simply saying "My friend died." Death is hard for us to acknowledge.

In contrast, these women came to the tomb for the most intimate and sacred of acts: to care for Jesus' physical body and to prepare it for burial. There is no more intimate or powerful way to acknowledge the reality of death than to lovingly care for a body in this way. You are faced with death right there. It cannot be avoided.

We have 2000 years of human history and a lifetime of hearing the Easter story of Jesus' resurrection and so we have a far different perspective than these women who witnessed Jesus' death and who came to prepare his body.

They bore the trauma of what they had witnessed and the nearness of his death. As they approached, they found the stone rolled away.

- When they went in, they did not find the body.
- As I said before, the women are *perplexed* by the stone which has been rolled away, the empty tomb, and not finding the body.
- They are *terrified* by the two men in dazzling clothes.

Their response is marked by trauma, shock, and confusion. Having seen what they have seen, is it any wonder they don't react with instant understanding and immediate joy?

### **What's the turning point? When do things begin to change?**

- They are reassured by the two men—messengers or angels:
  - "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen (Luke 24:5).

Okay. . . They are at least alerted that this is different. Jesus is not dead, but alive; he is risen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 23:49: "But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things." Luke 23:55-56: The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup>Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment."

- But, as Luke tells the story, the risen Jesus is not present. There is no body, but there is also no risen Jesus in Luke's story.

And then more instruction: <sup>6</sup>**Remember** how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

**At least three times as recorded in Luke, Jesus tells his disciples about the suffering and death he would undergo, but they did not "get it."**<sup>2</sup>

One of those times, Jesus even pointedly said to them:

- <sup>44</sup>'Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.'
- <sup>45</sup>But they did not understand this saying. . . and they were afraid to ask him . . . (18:44-45).

So, I think that their *remembering* is sort of the turning point for them. It's the beginning of their recognition or their piecing together of what Jesus said. And then after they start to remember, they ". . . return[ed] from the tomb [and] they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest (v. 9).

**How did the men respond to what the women said?**

- The men who heard them thought the story they told was an *idle tale*.

This word for *idle tale*, by the way, is **léros** (lay'-ros) in Greek. It's the word from which we get *delirious*. It means the men thought what the women were saying was crazy talk. This story is nonsense—it's crazy talk.

When the women *remember* they begin (just *begin*, because I think it is still overwhelming or shocking or too much to process) —they begin to piece together what they have heard and observed and learned about Jesus over perhaps 3 years' time and connect that with this event.

**Reassuring Good News for Us**

Luke tells an honest or "real" story, don't you think? He acknowledges the deep pain of loss that they have experienced as they have witnessed Jesus' death. He describes their devoted care as they bring the spices to the tomb. He describes how they are first terrified and then perplexed, but then begin to make some sense of what seems to be a "crazy story" as they *remember* what Jesus has said and done.

And isn't this real story good news for us? Isn't it good news which can be reassuring to us as we see these women who have witnessed this confusing surprise and who don't have it all figured out? They're just beginning to grasp what is happening—why Jesus' body isn't here and what these two men or angels are saying and how that fits together with what they have witnessed as followers of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> See Luke 9:21-22, 9:43-45, and 18:31-34

They go and tell the others and it sounds to them like “crazy talk.” Peter runs to the tomb and that conveys a sense of curiosity— “Can it really be true?”

He is amazed, but then he goes home. If he were truly transformed by this experience right now and had it all figured out, wouldn't he go out and shout this good news, too?

### **We can remember, too.**

Maybe we too, can listen to the instruction to *remember*. What have we heard and seen about how God has acted—about how we have seen God at work? This event was perplexing and shocking, and yet haven't we seen God do the unexpected before?

#### **What shall we remember?**

- Genesis affirms that by God's creative hand, light came out of a formless void and land was defined from water. God called them good.
- God formed creatures in God's own image and called them very good.
- God brought freedom to those in slavery in Egypt and they walked through the sea on dry land (Exodus 14:29).
- Gospel writer John says that “the Word became flesh and dwells among us” (John 1: 14). In the wonder of the incarnation, Jesus the king was born in the most humble way. Ordinary people like shepherds came to worship him and so did wisemen from far off. It was the most unexpected of births in a most unexpected place.
- In worship just a few weeks ago, we *remembered* that fussy religious people often grumbled that Jesus was always welcoming and eating with sinners (Luke 15:1). In response, Jesus told the story of the man with two sons (we most often call it *The Prodigal Son*) and two other stories of things that are lost: the lost sheep and the lost coin. He wanted us to recognize the joy that comes when something of value is found. Jesus has come to seek and save those who are lost.
- We *remember* that there is grace for us. We remember the reading from a few weeks ago in which Jesus says he wants to be like a Mother Hen, gathering her chicks around her to offer protection and care.

So, what shall we remember? This is a God of surprises, who does the unexpected. This is a story about a “king” who was born in a stable, an innocent man who was arrested and executed, and a tomb that is empty. You could say that it's a story that is perplexing and astounding from beginning to end. Jesus is not here—he is risen.

### **Go and Tell the Good News**

The women were perplexed and only beginning to figure it out. I think the honesty of that reaction is good news for us. Part of the good news for us in this story is that these women don't have it all figured out. They're just beginning to grasp what is happening—why Jesus' body isn't here and what these two men or angels are saying and how that fits together with what they have witnessed as followers of Jesus. They go and tell the others and it sounds to them like “crazy talk.” Peter runs to the tomb and

that conveys a sense of curiosity— “Can it really be true?” He is amazed, but then he goes home. If he were truly transformed by this experience right now and had it all figured out, wouldn't he go out and shout this good news, too?

I think that's good news because we can be reassured that we don't have to have everything figured out to have seen the good that God has done and then be able to tell others what we have seen. That's good news for us because wherever we are in figuring this all out—making some sense of . . .

- the life and ministry of Jesus,
- his seeking out the lost and overlooked,
- his willingness to suffer and die in self-giving love,
- the impact of his resurrection,
- the Communion with God and the community into which we are invited
- . . . no matter where we are in figuring that all out, God's love is deep and persistent and overflowing. This is Good News.

We who have met the risen Christ are to join the women in telling all of this on Easter Sunday morning. Thanks be to God for this surprising Good News we are invited to share.