

Luke 24:4-8 Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead? Easter Sunrise 03/27/2016

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, who is not dead, but is risen! Amen. The Word of God for Easter Sunrise service is written in Luke 24:4-8 These are Your Words heavenly Father. Keep our faith in the living Savior strong through Your truth. Amen.

Dear Believers in the risen Christ,

Many of you use some kind of Global Positioning System (GPS). They can be helpful when they work right. Sometimes, as you follow your GPS you can't find an address. You become frustrated when the voice keeps telling you to recalculate! You feel lost. But, then you spot person walking along the road. You pull up and ask, "Can you tell me where this person lives? The house is supposed to be near here according to my GPS!" The person points all around him to acres of tombstones and says, "I can't help you! You're looking for someone living among the dead." This morning in God's Word, we read of the women looking for Jesus' body at a cemetery. The positioning of their thinking was not right. The angel asked them,

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

These women weren't lost. They went to the last place where they had seen Jesus: the tomb where He had been buried. When we hear the angel's question, "*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*" the natural answer is **first, where else should we look?** These women had gotten up early that morning because they didn't want to leave Jesus' body in the tomb without a proper burial. They brought spices to put on His body to show their final respects. On the way there, they talked about how to move the large bolder covering the tomb. However that was no problem, when they got there the stone was rolled away. Inside they found Jesus' grave cloths all wrapped, but no body inside. That's when bright angelic beings appeared and said, "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!*"(v.6)

The angels' words were a reminder of Jesus' words. Earlier, He had said that He was going to die and rise the third day, but they couldn't understand at the time. So, the women weren't prepared for what happened on Friday or on Easter morning. We can relate to the women. We don't always see how Scripture should apply to specific cases in our lives, especially when trying to know the hidden will of God not revealed in His Word. The women couldn't understand how Jesus could come to life from death even though Jesus had promised it. These women had probably been on funeral duty many times. None of the people that they helped bury came back to life.

Why would Jesus be different? Well, just weeks before Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and these women knew it. But who was going to raise Jesus, since He was dead? The point of His miracles was to show that He had power over death as the Son of God. Paul later wrote, "*[Jesus] was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.*" (Romans 1:4) The angels said, "*Remember how he told you...: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*" (v. 6-7) They should have remembered His promise, but fear and doubt clouded their minds.

Sadly, the faith of these women wasn't strong enough during this horrible ordeal Christ's death. We have trials in life that hurt our faith. We doubt God's goodness when challenges in life seem impossible. We panic when the threat of death is in our face, whether a threat to our life or to the lives of people we love. People try to help us cope and tell us "Death is just a part of life. You'll be sad for a while, but like the women you can move on with practical things to do." No! Our faith needs more than that!

We need to know God's purpose and plan in Christ. We need God's Word to remind us, like the angels reminded the women. They said: "*He is not here; He has risen!*" In His great love as our Savior, Jesus died on the cross and then rose from death. All people who die trusting in Jesus will have eternal life with Him! Our faith may be weak at times just like it was for the women that Easter morning. Yet, the news of Christ's resurrection is a living force that changes our hearts. It is the source of strength for our faith, especially in difficult days of life.

What difference does it make if you look for a person's name on a mailbox or a tombstone? You can find most names in both places, but you can only receive help from the one who is living. That's the point the angels were making. **Second, the living Christ makes all the difference!** Too often, when we feel overwhelmed by guilt, we then look for Jesus in the wrong places. Where are we supposed to find Him? Some people want to find Him by experience. They want to know Him only by their feelings. Some want miracles on demand before they will trust in Jesus. We also must deal with corrupt and sinful hearts. If we are searching for the Son of God with just our intellect or feeling and not using God's Word, we're looking for the living among the dead. The irony of the resurrection is that Jesus is not found where people expect Him to be. Instead, He's where He said He would be: in His Word.

Jesus has the perfect global positioning system. He knows right where we are at all times in faith and life. He reveals Himself to us. If we just open up our Bibles, He will become a constant help for us. Also, we have Christ in baptism, where He personally assures us that our sins are washed away. We have Him in Holy Communion, where He gives us His body that was given into death for us and His blood which was shed to forgive our sins. The angels pointed these women back to Jesus' words: "*The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.*" (v.7) If the women and the disciples had understood that message, Good Friday through Sunday would have been different. Their hearts would have still been broken when Jesus was crucified, but they would not have lost hope in Him. Without hope, they dealt with death as only they knew how with spices and weeping.

Thankfully, Jesus knew how to deal with death! He lived His whole life without sin so that death could not harm Him. Yet He died because our sinful lives deserved death and eternity in hell. Since His death was innocent, on Easter Sunday Jesus rose! His resurrection is God's proof that Jesus has paid for every sin of every sinner. Our accounts are clear. God does not hold against us the sins and failures that torment us. God calls us innocent through Jesus. "*He was given over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.*" (Romans 4:25) Jesus promised that since He rose, we will rise. Death can't hold us any longer. Jesus has destroyed its power. And when He returns in glory, we will live with Him forever.

That's what the angel meant when he said, "*Remember what he told you.*" Luke wrote, "*Then they remembered his words.*" (v.8) His words show that the power of the Holy Spirit was at work to strengthen and enlighten their faith. Suddenly, the truth became real for them. They heard the promise of life in Jesus. Hearing it, they believed. There was much more to learn. God was just beginning to mature their faith so that they could not only face life and death, but help others like the disciples do the same!

Today, we remember that the women weren't lost when they couldn't find Jesus' body at the cemetery. Rather, that day, Christ found them and through the words of the angels He taught what it meant that the tomb was empty. He had risen just as He said. Because He lives, we can be sure that our sins are gone. Because He lives, God promises that we will live with Him forever. Because He lives, we have life here by faith in Jesus. His resurrection has us looking in the right place to find Him: His Word. "*He is risen, just as He said!*" Amen.