

Remember: Jesus Is Risen!

A sermon based on Luke 24:1-12 - *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "⁸ Then they remembered his words.*

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

One day, this past week, Mara was down in my office, having a rough morning. She was trying to shoo Finley out of the room, saying he was going to bother her and there was no room for him (which, there was plenty of room). As I had him come over and lay down by me, Becky told Mara she was hurting Finley's feelings, Mara replied, "Finley doesn't have any feelings," so I said, "Mara, remember when Mommy and I went down to Arizona to adopt you? Things here were so crazy, we were running around, packing, making travel plans. We were nervous but excited, but Finley, he got really sad. He just laid by our suitcases, he didn't really want to eat, he would tense up when he was walking, he could barely make it up and down the steps, he took on all our apprehension and stress. So, Finley has feelings. Remember that?"

You know, what a precious gift that is, the gift of memory. Maybe, today, you have fond memories of past Easters. Ladies, seeing the girls in their cute Easter dresses reminds you of Easters gone by, when Mom and Dad gave you those pretty dresses to wear, and you felt so beautiful. They hymn we just sang, "I Know that My Redeemer Lives," maybe you remember that being the staple song sung every Easter...and it's your favorite. The Easter traditions you remember growing up with are ones you are carrying on with your family...maybe a specific dish for Easter breakfast, the Easter egg hunt, the searching for Easter baskets, being here at worship.

Friends, I'm glad you're here today to remember with me once again something far greater than all of that. You're here to remember you have a Savior who lived, and died, and now is risen for you...and for your forgiveness...and for your eternal life. And we're rejoicing in that!

Remember. It's easy to imagine that's what these women who had followed Jesus for the 3+ years of his ministry were doing on their way to his tomb early Easter morning. I mean, as far as they knew, Jesus' body was there, wrapped up rather hastily, what with the rush to bury him on Good Friday before the Passover began and they couldn't do any work...but now they could give him more of a proper burial. As far as they knew, Jesus – their Master, their friend – was still very much dead. They had been there. They remembered Jesus nailed to, being lifted up on the cross. They remember the agony he suffered, both physically from the crucifixion and also emotionally as many continued to scream obscenities at him and mock him, hanging there helplessly. They remembered him breathing his last breath.

But anything they were remembering...everything they knew (or at least thought they did) was completely turned on its head the moment they arrived at the tomb. Because what did they see? The massive stone rolled away and nobody and no body inside. Jesus' body was gone.

How would you have reacted? Probably similar to those women, who began wondering what had taken place. They were perplexed, puzzled by the situation, maybe even having some doubt starting to creep in because, I mean, just the fact the tomb was empty wasn't proof of Jesus' resurrection. For all they knew, it could have been grave robbers.

Thankfully, God didn't leave them with only that, the empty tomb. Two angels appeared and gave them the greatest news they had ever heard, "***He is not here; he has risen! Remember (not the past couple of days, but even further back) while he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.***"

Remember. And they did. And their grief and their doubt turned to instant joy. And they ran to tell others...the disciples. And the women's news, while it was met mostly with disbelief from those men, their excitement trickled down to at least a couple of the disciples, Peter and John, as they both ran to the tomb to see for themselves. And, at least for Peter, he saw and wondered as well. But this was different wondering...not in the doubting sense as with the women, but more like he was marveling at what he was seeing and what had happened. Maybe he sensed a miracle had taken place. Maybe he remembered those same words of Jesus. Maybe he didn't.

But we do. We know. We remember. How could we ever...why would we ever want to forget? That's why we're here today, isn't it? To hear and remember this wonderful news of a Savior who loves us, who lived for us and died for us and now is risen and lives again for us. And that news gladdens your heart, doesn't it?

Does it?

I think we can all agree while remembering...while memories are a precious gift from God, they can also be somewhat of a curse. Can you think of how?

While we're certainly happy to be here, who here isn't lugging around some kind of emotional baggage? Maybe you've hit a rough patch recently, your job isn't going so great, or you're struggling to find work...and so bills are becoming tougher to pay, and either you're wearing yourself out with a side joy (meaning you have no free time and am missing out on precious moments with your family or friends or loved ones)...or you're so stressed worrying about you might not be able to make ends meet, so you're suffering from anxiety or migraines. And that's what's on your mind today...that's what you're thinking about...remembering.

Maybe you're angry, a friend betrayed you, shared something personal you had told them in confidence, and you're feeling so hurt, so mad because it seems like someone is always doing that, stabbing you in the back when you've been nothing but kind and caring and loyal to them, and you can't help but remember that right now on a day supposed to be filled with so much love and peace and joy.

Maybe you're just tired...not of the snow, but just life. You try to be a good person, do the right thing - the Jesus thing, not get sucked into all the garbage going on in our world today, and for your moral stance, you get blasted, made fun of, ridiculed...or at least you always feel like you're always having to be on the defensive. And those memories are hard.

And, maybe you're like those women at the tomb, doubting, wondering...wondering where God is, why doesn't he love me, why didn't he stop this, why does he allow bad things to happen to good people, like me.

And then, you get God's Word, which unfortunately reminds you "***there is no one who does good, not even one***" (*Romans 3:12*). But "***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***" (*Romans 3:23*). So, the sad reality is there are no good people in God's eyes here. And that includes you and me...so now, it's not just what others have done to you and who's wronged you. Now, it's remembering who you've wronged, how you've hurt them, what you've done, the pain you've caused others, especially God, and the guilt is something you won't let yourself forget.

How could we possibly forget the great things God has done for us, especially the amazing news of today? Easy. We're sinners who have guilt, we have fears, we have doubts, and we sometimes are too slow or too unwilling to remember and believe God's promises. And, too often, we start to lose sight of God's amazing love for us.

But again, I'm glad you're here today...because now, we get to hear, we get to remember that love God has for you. And it all goes back to what the angels said to the women at the tomb. Listen again, "***Remember how [Jesus] told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."***"

"The Son of Man must." Do you know how incredible that short phrase is...how impactful it is for you? We spent this past week walking with Jesus to the cross, and that walk entailed so much pain and suffering and hardship and stress and grief...for Jesus. And that road ended with him being handed over to his enemies and crucified. It ended in death. Remember?

Remember why he walked that path? ***"The Son of Man must."*** He had to. From Adam and Eve's fall into sin til that moment, that was God's plan for Jesus, to live perfectly for us so that his perfection would be given to us when he was nailed to the cross and died, bearing all our sins and bearing the eternal punishment for all our sins. So they're gone...forgiven. And it's not like Jesus was forced against his will to go through all that pain. I saw a post of Facebook that said, "***Why do bad things happen to good people? That only happened once – and he volunteered.***" For us and to save us, Jesus gladly and willingly said, "Yes, I will go and die." And he did...because he loves you and cares about you...to heaven and back.

But we're not done...because Jesus wasn't done. On Easter morning, out of the grave came the one who paid for all your sins. He carried them to the cross. He left them in the tomb. Your sins are gone! They are dead! They are buried! Out of the grave came our Lord Jesus Christ. On the cross he had been

covered with our sins, and he had suffered death. But now he is alive—the proof that God has accepted his sacrifice, his work, your forgiveness.

Remember that? Remember that! The heart of our Christian faith is remembering—remembering what God has done for us...even this Easter morning—remember Jesus' life, death, and especially his resurrection so that through faith in him we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven.

Seeing Jesus, raised from the dead, creates unshakable faith and hope that is ours no matter what happens in our earthly lives. Around 1930, a Russian communist leader named Bukharin journeyed from Moscow to Kiev. His mission was to address a huge reeducation assembly. His subject: atheism. For a solid hour he aimed his heavy verbal artillery at Christianity, hurling argument and ridicule. At last he was finished and viewed what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. A solitary man arose and asked permission to speak. He mounted the platform and moved close to the communist. For a while he slowly scanned the audience. At last he shouted the ancient Orthodox greeting, "Christ is risen!" ("Christos anestay!") The vast assembly arose as one man, and the response came crashing like the sound of an avalanche: "He is risen indeed!" ("Aleythos anestay!")

I have always wondered about the cynics and nonbelievers. What do they do at Easter? On this day when the Christian church joyfully celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ, what do they do? What about when their life is near a cold graveside, where everything seems so final, so meaningless? It's precisely at that point our Christian faith remembers and holds on to the promise of Jesus: "***I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die***" (Jn 11:25).

And even now, when your emotional baggage is so heavy, too heavy to carry, our Christian faith remembers Jesus' promises... that yes, "***Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me***" (Matthew 16:24), but he also promises, "***I am with you always, to the very end of the age***" (Matthew 28:20); "***in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose***" (Romans 8:28); "***Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life***" (Revelation 2:10). Jesus' resurrection victory today enables us to always remember those loving promises, even in the hardest moments of life.

"Remember, Mara, when we went to Arizona to adopt you?" Of course she doesn't remember that. She wasn't here. She wasn't even born yet. But it's part of her life story. It always will be, and so we share it so she knows.

Remember, "Jesus has risen!" You weren't there at the empty tomb, with the women. And yet, Jesus' resurrection is still part of your story. Jesus hasn't just risen; he still is risen. And our risen Savior is still here. He's still victorious over sin and Satan and death for you. That's your story.

And it will be to the end of life. Right, on the doorstep of death, it won't be childhood joys or memories of teenage freedom or professional accomplishments or friends or family that you'll remember. It's this. You have a Savior who loves you endlessly...who lived and died and now is risen for you. Jesus is risen! And we will live with him forever. Rejoice! Amen.

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