

[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter Sunday
April 20, 2025

Christ Is Arisen!

Luke 24:1–12

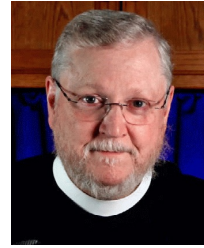
¹ Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. ³ Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. ⁵ Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

⁸ And they remembered His words. ⁹ Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. ¹¹ And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.

Christ is arisen
From the grave's dark prison.
We now rejoice with gladness;
Christ will end all sadness.
Lord, have mercy.

Our Gospel from St. Luke this morning bids us to come up out of our everyday lives and pay a visit to a tomb, to the grave of Jesus of Nazareth who has recently died. Heading down the path that leads to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in which Jesus was laid, a group of women comes into view, and it's the story they bring that gives us reason to gather here this, and every, Sunday morning.

The journey of the women is one that begins with dark thoughts. They began by preparing burial spices with which to embalm their deceased friend and teacher, who had been hastily put in the grave on Friday, so that His body wouldn't be touched once the Sabbath had begun. It would be an unpleasant job, to say the least. These were women who dearly loved this Teacher and Miracle-worker. They had even thought that He was the Messiah, the promised deliverer of Israel. But now, all their hopes being dashed to



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pieces by His agonizing death, the women come to anoint His body, already in its third day of decay.

Surely we can understand their thoughts of loneliness, of sorrow, of despair. We've gone to the grave, too, for loved ones and friends – even this very week. We've seen the coffin lowered into the vault as our fond memories are severed from the plans we had made for the future. With thoughts like these the women went to Jesus' grave to do their unpleasant task.

But, when they arrived, what should they find but an empty tomb! The stone was rolled away; Jesus was nowhere to be seen; what could this mean? They had no experience to which they could relate such a thing; they didn't know what to make of it.

How sin blinds us. How our lack of trust in the promises of God keeps us from seeing and receiving what He would give us. How truly Satan has gotten us to look at the world as though God never existed at all!

Yet, how gracious God is. He would not leave the women wondering long. Suddenly, two of His messengers stood beside them, angels in glistening white. The women bowed their faces in terror, perhaps realizing from this glorious appearance that they weren't taking God into account, though at the same time not yet understanding what all this meant.

Tenderly, the angels didn't rebuke them for their unbelief, for their sorrow. Rather, they spoke reassuring words, explaining why the tomb was empty: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!"

Why do you look for the Living One among those who are dead? He's alive! He's risen! Don't be sad! He has risen from the dead; He's the LIVING ONE; He lives forever!!! This Jesus whom you seek has now done the miracle of miracles: He has risen from the dead.

But, no . . . this is more than a miracle: He has kept a promise. "Remember how He told you: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and ON THE THIRD DAY BE RAISED AGAIN'."

Jesus made the most impossible promise, and yet HE KEPT IT! His Word is true, beloved! ALL of His promises are sure; if He could do this, He can do *anything*! All the promises . . . they're true; everything He said . . . we can count on:

"I have come to seek and to save the lost"

"This is My blood, which I am pouring out for you, so that your sins are forgiven"

"I AM THE RESURRECTION and the life; He who believes in Me shall never die"

"Because I live, you, too, shall live"

Indeed, "All the promises of God are yea and amen in Jesus Christ our Lord." Because we see fulfilled the words of the Psalmist: "You will not allow Your Holy One's body to undergo corruption," we can trust the message of the angel before Jesus' birth, "you shall



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call Him JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins."

Yes, "I KNOW that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this SWEET SENTENCE gives." It is so good to KNOW . . . so good to know . . . that the women HAD to tell!

But, look at the reaction – even of the disciples! "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them as nonsense." They considered their words to be NONSENSE! No one had ever heard anything like it before. Yes, they had seen Jesus raise people from the dead, just as the prophet Elijah had done; but NO ONE had ever raised *Himself* from the dead! A deadman can't do anything, much less make Himself alive! But JESUS DID!

The disciples couldn't bring themselves to believe such a thing. And it wasn't, as some have recently suggested, because they heard it from women! The three women named in our Gospel were among the most respected members of the community of believers, and there were apparently several others with them as well. It wasn't because of the witnesses that the disciples had trouble believing; it was simply their own GRIEF and their GLOOM and their SIN, just as it was for the women when they first went into the tomb.

This should be kept in mind as WE try to bring the Good News to others as well. Their belief isn't of our making, but, like the disciples', it takes the work of God Himself to convince a sinner and to create and sustain faith. Only by God's gracious work in the heart (through Baptism and the Gospel) does a person believe that Jesus is risen from the dead and so believe that Jesus' death was more than just 'a death', but a real, full payment for all our sin . . . and a promise of better things to come.

Gloriously, God did work, later on this same day, as Jesus appeared to the various disciples. In fact, this early doubt and rejection by the disciples makes what happened later even more glorious, as those who were skeptics were so convinced that they would even become martyrs!

What about us? Do we find that in our daily lives we're not so greatly moved? Maybe it's because we're too familiar with the story . . . maybe we don't let it 'sink in' . . . maybe we're not really paying attention during Lent, so that the Good Friday message just doesn't hit home . . . the devastation . . . the horror . . . that God's own Son should go to the cross and DIE . . . that the loss we feel when a loved one dies was what the disciples felt and more . . . and what we should feel as well.

If we would but take a little time each day to dwell on the thought of Christ on the cross, writhing in the pain of His physical and spiritual torment, dying for our sins – your sins, my sins – by God's grace, we would come more quickly to this empty tomb, to be assured that His sacrifice was accepted and that eternal life is ours.

He is arisen! Glorious Word!
Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
the gates of heav'n are open!



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He's risen! He is risen indeed! Come to the empty tomb and see that Christ, by death, has won the victory! Hear His glorious Word, beloved, and know that YOU will live forever! Jesus Christ is risen today. Hallelujah! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen