

**Sunday, April 17, 2022 – Easter Sunday**

**“He Is Here!”**

Luke 24: 1-12

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Adapted from CPR 32.2

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sometimes a sermon title can be accurate but still communicate the wrong message. I

remember one Easter morning on which the pastor’s sermon title read: “He Is Not Here, He Has Risen.”

The title came straight from the Bible, from our reading, in fact. But that sermon came centuries later.

The church held people waiting to hear that Jesus had risen from the dead, and he was there that

morning. The title of the sermon needed to be altered just a bit. “Jesus Has Risen! He Is Now Here!”

Changing not to now changes everything for us listening today! Confusion and fear give way to a

confident faith and hope because Jesus has risen, because He is now here!

But back then, when the women met the angels, they needed to hear Jesus was not in the tomb.

They needed to be reminded of Jesus’ words that he would rise from the dead on the third day.

They come to the tomb expecting to care for a dead body. The spices they bring were for embalming the

man who died on the cross. When they arrive, they are confused. The stone is rolled off to the side. The

tomb contains no body, just emptiness. Where is Jesus? His body had disappeared. They are at a loss as

to what had happened.

Then the angels appear. These heavenly beings frighten the women. We sometimes imagine

angels as cute, cuddly, baby-like cherubs. But most often in the Bible, they are powerful beings that

simply send someone to fall to the ground in fear and awe. The women do just that, they bow to the

ground in front of the angels. But the angels aren’t there to frighten the women. They have come to

assure them, to remind them, to bring a faith back to life in them. They do not do this with power and

fear, but with a simple message. Jesus is not in the tomb. He has risen. He has kept his promise. He died

at the hands of sinful men. Now, on the third day, he has risen from the dead, just as he said he would.

He is not there, in that tomb. The women needed to hear that good news.

Watch what happens next. They remember. They believe. Even though Jesus isn't standing there in front of them, even though all they've seen with their eyes is an empty grave and some angels, they believe. And with an active, living faith, they dash away to tell the disciples that wonderful news of the first Easter morning.

Confusion and fear change to belief and hope. Soon they will see Jesus. They will know just exactly where he is. Not in the tomb. But with them. At that moment, though, Jesus is not there. I wonder if perhaps we struggle with the same emotions as the women did back then. We're confused. We're frightened. Not at a stone rolled away. Or by encountering angels. But by what life simply throws at us that makes us ask, "Where is Jesus? He doesn't seem to be here. And what is here is frightening."

A black man dies as a police officer kneels on his neck until he breathes no more. The country erupts with protests, and many people start to see racism embedded in so many institutions and systems in our way of life. But then all police seem to be demonized. A small fraction use the protesting as cover to destroy and vandalize. Black lives, blue lives, all lives battle it out. What could have been a moment for biblical justice to bring change and healing is lost, while anger, hate, and violence divide people into political camps. You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

A pandemic sweeps across the nation, around the globe. At first, we lock down together to do battle against this unseen enemy. We learn how to protect one another and ourselves, and keep our health care system from being overwhelmed. But as the months drag on, the fighting takes over. Everything turns political. The loneliness and depression are worse than the virus. We want to get together for Christmas like we always do. But wait, doctors and nurses are exhausted. We've run out of ICU beds for those who are sick. Other surgeries have to be postponed, and cancer treatments suspended, preventative check-ups are passed by. Protect your neighbor, your family members. Both sides claim political allies. Even in churches, divisions rage on. You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

The church suffers as well. Attendance goes down. Those who watched online at first begin to drift away. Pastors and church workers grow weary and are even attacked for whatever they decide to do. They can't visit people in the hospitals and nursing homes. Polls show 38% have given serious thought to quitting professional ministry altogether. You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

But sometimes the confusion and fear come not from the world or the country or even the church. Sometimes they infect you from the really close-to-home moments. The friend who you haven't seen in years, shockingly different looking at the viewing than you remember them earlier in their life. Staring at what age and death do to someone you know makes you realize what it's doing to you as well. The sight can leave you confused, but, even more so, frightened. Where is Jesus when all this happens? What we need to hear is that he has risen and he is here! Yes, he is now here.

Where? Imagine a baptismal font. Before the service, someone pours water into the basin. A white napkin is placed on the side, along with a baptismal certificate and a candle. The service begins and a family, with godparents, sits up front. At the appropriate time the mom and dad, holding the baby, step to the font. Godparents are standing across from them. The pastor begins the liturgy. Soon the moment comes. The mother lowers her child over the water. Three times the pastor dips his hand into the basin and splashes water on the child's head, all the while speaking the name of the child and the name of the triune God. Where is Jesus at that moment? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and now lives in that child. Faith and hope arise in the child and are renewed in those watching. Then remember—one time it was you who was brought into Jesus' living presence at a baptismal font. Where is Jesus? Look at the altar. Before the service, the altar guild brought out the elements and covered it with a white cloth. Communion wafers are readied to be used. The service moves along until the pastor speaks familiar words. "Jesus Christ, on the night on which he was betrayed... 'Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you... Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood,

which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’” Your pew is ushered forward. You kneel at the rail. The bread is placed in your hand and then your mouth. A sip of wine runs over your tongue. Where is Jesus at that moment? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and lives in you. He renews your faith and hope once again. He is not in the tomb. He is here in our midst, in our church, in your life. Confusion and fear give way to a confident faith and hope.

Where is Jesus? Open a Bible. Find passages of promise – I’ll paraphrase some: “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” “For neither death nor life, angels nor demons nor any power, height nor depth nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus.” “I am the resurrection and the life. He who dies in me yet lives.” When you read passages from God’s Word like these, Jesus is moving and working in you, building up your faith and renewing your hope by the power of his Holy Spirit.

Now remember what the women did after the angels reminded them of Jesus’ words, after their faith came to life and hope returned. “And returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.” They ran and told the disciples. They didn’t stay at the tomb! They went back to their lives. They went back to their lives with the risen Jesus present with them. So do we. We leave this worship service, a service where Jesus has been present because he promised where two or three or more are gathered together, there he would be. We go back to our lives. We go back to injustice and anger. We go back to division and strife. We go back to sickness and aging muscles. But we do not go back alone. We go back with Jesus. We go back with a powerful message. He has risen, he is now here.

Fred Craddock was a well-known teacher of preaching from another denomination. He died a few years ago. Late in his life, in a sermon titled “Jesus Saves.” Dr. Craddock spoke about a living faith that brings hope even when so much confusion and doubt can assail us in life. He said he first went to the Messiah thinking that wherever Christ would be, there could be no misery. Instead, he says, he came to realize that wherever misery is, Christ will be there. Then he paused to let that sink in. Will life in

Christ be easy? No. But where there's misery, there Christ is. We go out from this Easter service with that confident faith and living hope. We go out with that simple message: Jesus has risen! He is now here!

Each of us will come to that time when that last great enemy, death, will confront us with all its ugly, frightening, confusing reality. We will stand before a grave and the test of faith will rise up from the depths of our souls. You know that feeling when you stop to visit the grave of a loved one – a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a child, a friend. You read their name, the date of their birth and date of their death. You remember the circumstances of their death, the times you had with them and the hole in your life with them gone. Where is Jesus? He is taking care of them, and He promises that He will raise them with Him on the last day.

On this Easter morning, listen to the words of the angels: "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise" (vv 6b-7). The women staring at an empty tomb needed to hear the words, "He is not here, but has risen" (v 6a). But we, for a living faith and a confident hope, need to hear those words differently. We need to hear this message once again: He has risen! He is now here! Amen.