

August 20, 2023

**The Gospel of Luke**  
**LXX. Remember How He Told You**  
**Luke 22:1-12**

John DuBose  
Easley Presbyterian Church  
Easley, South Carolina

“He is not here, but has risen.” Jesus Christ is risen! This incredible story is the greatest Good News anyone will ever hear. It is the beating heart of the Christian faith. One preacher says, the event of Christ’s resurrection is the hinge upon which all of history pivots.<sup>1</sup> Everything that came before looked forward to this event. Everything that has happened since looks back. But is that how we treat this story? Is it Good News for us? Do we really believe it? Or is it just a story. After all, what good is a story anyway?

At first, my impulse in writing this sermon was to apologize for preaching about Easter in August. We already had Easter a few months ago, so why should we have it again? But then a wise preacher reminded me that every Sunday is Easter for the people who live in a world in which Christ has been raised. Every Sunday is a chance to meet the risen Christ. That’s what church is for, after all.

So how about this morning? Well, curiously, in this Easter text from Luke’s Gospel, we don’t actually meet the risen Christ. He doesn’t make an appearance at all. All the evidence we have is that the tomb is empty. And really, that’s not proof of anything other than that Christ’s body is not there. Maybe it was moved. In fact, the very last thing that anyone would expect from an empty tomb is that the one who was laying in it decided to get up and walk out. The dead are supposed to stay dead, after all.

That’s what the women in this story expected. They brought spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, their Lord. They were going to do this because they loved him and they wanted to honor him in a way that was appropriate for that time and place. The women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, had been with Jesus this whole time, following him through his passion. They had watched him die. They went with Joseph of Arimathea as he took his body off the cross. They watched Joseph as he wrapped Jesus’s body in linen cloths. They went with him to the tomb and saw where he placed him. But when they at last returned after the Sabbath had ended, they found the tomb empty. Luke says they were perplexed. Certainly, that’s understandable. It’s perplexing to think that this body which they saw laid down is no longer there. What could have happened?

But then, their confusion turns to fear as two men in dazzling apparel appear before their eyes. “Why do you seek the living among the dead,” they ask. The women bow their faces to the ground. Of course, it was rhetorical question. You see, the women had not been seeking the

---

<sup>1</sup> (Mertins, 2023)

living among the dead at all. They had been seeking the dead among the dead. Why would Jesus be alive? We watched him die!

But with their heads bowed, the next words they hear; “He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you...”

And like a flood, the truth rushes over them. Their confusion and their fear are transformed into joy as the memory of all that Jesus had said and done returned to them. The life he had lived, his ministry of grace, his love for the world, his willing obedience to the Father, his agonizing passion, his death upon the cross. And not only that, but the ways he had unfolded the scriptures to them about himself. Who the messiah was to be and how he was, himself, the Christ. “He is not here, but has risen.”

These women did not need to see Jesus in order to believe, in the very deepest part of themselves, he had been raised. Think about that. The first witnesses to the resurrection weren’t witnesses at all. None of the four Gospel accounts, in fact, narrate the resurrection of Jesus directly.<sup>2</sup> They don’t tell us how he got up from the place where he was laid. Did he roll the stone away by himself, or did he simply walk through the wall as he would later do in Jerusalem? Maybe the stone was moved not so that he could leave, but so that the women could come in.<sup>3</sup> Maybe we don’t get these details because they’re not important to the reality of what happened. Faith comes by hearing, not by sight. They remembered what they had heard. They remembered what he told them. And so, with joy, they rushed back to tell the disciples what their hearts now knew to be true: Jesus is alive; he has been raised from death!

But the disciples don’t believe it. Our translation says the disciples considered it an idle tale. Silly talk. Nonsense. Garbage...

And, honestly, why would they believe it? They couldn’t prove it. Why would a dead man come back to life? It is nonsense. It is garbage. Nobody goes to visit a grave expecting to see that their loved one has stopped being dead all of a sudden. It doesn’t make any sense. In fact, it’s almost insulting to even think about. How can you women seriously come here saying that he’s alive? You watched him die. Just let us grieve in peace.

And then there’s Peter. Dear Peter. You’ll remember how just a few days before, he had denied Jesus three times. “I do not know the man,” he said. And in that moment, Jesus had looked upon him and Peter met his gaze. Tears filled his eyes. He “wept bitterly,”<sup>4</sup> says the text. Surely there was a pit in Peter’s stomach that wouldn’t go away. The weight of his guilt over having denied his friend was weighing him down to the ground. Pulling on him like an anchor around his neck. “If I had only stayed with him, would things have been different?” The agony of what he had done, or rather, what he had not done, we can imagine, was eating away at his soul.

So, when the women come rushing in, telling the other disciples this miraculous news. That they had seen two men in dazzling white, where does Peter’s mind immediately go? Perhaps you’ll also remember, as Peter probably did, another story in the life of Jesus. When Peter and James and John went with Jesus up a mountain. And while they were there, two men appeared with Jesus: Moses and Elijah. Two men. Dazzling white, just as the women had seen.

---

<sup>2</sup> (Small, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> (Culpepper, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:62

And what were they talking about? The memories come rushing back upon Peter as well. The two men with Jesus were speaking of his departure, his *exodus* in Jerusalem. Could this be what he was talking about? Was he really serious after all?

Yes, and on that mountain with Jesus and James and John, Peter hears a voice from a cloud saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”<sup>5</sup> Listen to him! What did the two men say to the women at the tomb? They said, “Remember how he told you.” In other words, “Listen to him.” Faith comes by hearing, not by sight. Just like the women, Peter also remembered. What once seemed to him to be an idle tale had become for him the greatest news ever told. The guilt and the anguish are washed away by a wave of hope within him. Peter rushes to see the empty tomb for himself.

But what does Peter find there? The text says he finds linen cloths lying in the tomb. Linen cloths which once covered the dead body of Jesus. In John’s Gospel account of this same story, we learn that Peter finds the grave clothes folded neatly where his body once laid<sup>6</sup>. What does this mean? Is it just that Jesus had nice manners? No, I don’t think so. I don’t think that’s quite the point. These linen cloths, these grave clothes, Jesus left behind because he no longer had any need of them. What Christ has done is accomplished. It is complete. He has died once, no more to die. He has laid death aside; conquering it once and for all. And not only did he conquer death, but he did so neatly, easily; he was tidy about it. He folded it up and laid death aside and left it in the tomb, just as he has done with our sin and with our death. One preacher says, it’s that thing you cannot quite take hold of or perhaps the thing you can’t let go of. Jesus takes it from you and he folds it up gently, and he leaves it in the tomb.<sup>7</sup>

Friends, This is the promise he makes to us. This is the reality that the risen Christ calls us to live within. He died, so that we might live. He took our sin and he laid it aside. In our baptism, we die a death like his so that we, too, might rise in a resurrection like his. Like Peter, whose life had become despair, who knew nothing but a guilt which threatened to consume him, like Peter, when we hear the story of Christ raised, our sorrow turns to joy as we are swallowed up by grace. A grace made real by the resurrected Jesus. An entirely new creation in the world. This is what it means to be a resurrection people.

The Transfiguration; the Easter story; the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus; all these things are not merely facts about Jesus that we recite out of habit. These are realities in which we now live. We live in a world where Jesus... think about this... where Jesus, who was dead, has been raised to new life. A life unlike anything the world has known. Don’t misunderstand this: Jesus did not come back from the dead like. He didn’t return to the life that he had before. He was raised to a new life. A different sort of life. Paul calls this a new creation. The immortality of the divine brought bodily to earth, which means that Jesus is now alive. His resurrection is ongoing and it means something for us. If he had come back from the dead like Lazarus in John’s gospel or Jairus’s daughter, he would have lived another 30 years or so and died, but Jesus didn’t come back to life; he *was raised in newness of life*. He’s alive in a way that makes his presence real to us even now.

---

<sup>5</sup> Luke 9:35

<sup>6</sup> John 20:7

<sup>7</sup> (Mertins, 2023)

And the best part about this new life is that it doesn't depend upon us. Easter happens whether we like it or not.<sup>8</sup> Through his singular death and perpetual resurrection, Jesus Christ has accomplished our forgiveness and our justification apart from our control. Nothing we can do about it. But what we can do is respond. How do we respond? By sharing the story of this new reality with one another. "Listen to Him." "Remember how he told you." Faith comes by hearing, so tell the story! Share it because when people hear it, God's Spirit creates a living faith within them. What good is a story? My friends, this story raises the dead. Thanks be to God.

## References

- Culpepper, R. A. (1995). *The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*. In L. E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Mertins, T. (2023, April 3). *Crackers and Grapejuice*. Retrieved from Easter [A] - Post-Apocalyptic Merrymaking: <https://crackersandgrapejuice.com/easter-a-post-apocalyptic-merrymaking/>
- Small, J. D. (2019). Luke 12:1-12 Commentary 2. In J. B. Green, T. G. Long, L. A. Powery, & C. L. Rigby, *Connections: Year C, Volume 3* (pp. 198-199). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

---

<sup>8</sup> (Mertins, 2023)