

Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection of Our Lord + April 21, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
The Living Among the Dead

The Word of the Lord from Luke 24:5-6: the angels said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Those are the first words that the women hear from angels when they reach the tomb. One can only imagine their state of mind. It's early in the morning on the day after Sabbath. They're tired and stricken, nerves frayed with grief and worry. The last days have them reeling, for they saw Jesus ride into Jerusalem to the crowd's hosannas. Then – so soon! – they also heard the mob crying "Crucify Him" in the darkness. They saw His bloodied back as He stumbled under the weight of the cross. They saw Him crucified, they heard His cries, they watched Him die, they saw the spear and blood and water flow. They marked the tomb where He was laid, then lay low through the Sabbath as the law required.

Now they've come, driven by their grief to *do something*. They've brought spices, they're dedicated and fearful and grief-stricken and despairing and oh-so-tired and trying to do the right thing for Jesus; and they come to His tomb, find the stone rolled away and they see angels. Angels who speak. Smart-aleck angels, apparently: who else would say, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The answer is, "You don't." You don't seek the living among the dead. That's not why the women have come, otherwise they wouldn't have lugged all those spices all that way. You don't seek the living among the dead because, for everybody since Adam, the last trip to the cemetery is a one-way ticket. That's the curse of sin – the wages of sin is death. No getting around that.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" – What kind of a nonsense question is that? What kind of angels are these? There's no way this doesn't rub salt in their raw wounds ... unless ... unless the angels are saying that Jesus is alive.

Which is precisely what they are saying! They go on: "He – Christ – is not here, but has risen. 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."

Jesus lives! And Jesus lives *just as He told them* before He died. It was always the plan. He has borne the sins of the world to the cross. He has suffered His Father's wrath and forsakenness. He has paid the price in full, defeated the devil, broken the curse of sin, even broken the grave!

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The rest of this gospel lesson is a beautiful thing that ought to bring such comfort for you. Look at the women at this point of the story: they have heard that Jesus is risen, and they have remembered His promises. They haven't seen Jesus yet, but faith comes by hearing. Hearing and remembering the Word, they believe; and even if others don't believe them – even if the apostles (!) think they're full of idle talk, they trust the promise that Jesus is risen from the dead. Rejoice in these women, for they are you who walk by faith, not by sight.

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"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" What a great, joyful, non-smart-alecky question to rejoice in on Easter Sunday. But there is more joy: for, you see, Jesus has been the living among the dead for a long time.

Apart from Christ, all are dead men walking: the body works for a while, the mind works more or less, but the soul is dead and resistant to God. Sometimes this is so apparent, as when wicked people break the Fifth Commandment and kill, break the Sixth Commandment and abuse innocents, break the Seventh Commandment to steal and destroy – sometimes spectacularly. When people break such commandments and defy God in a way that does great harm to their fellow man, it's more obvious that they are far from God.

But they are not the only ones among the living dead. There will be those who are decent people and humanitarians, but who see no need to give glory to God or even acknowledge Him. They may be role models for the last seven commandments, but they break the first three. They don't cause physical harm to their fellow man, but they teach by their lives that one does not need God. Thus we don't go by appearances, but we believe what Jesus has said about mankind: namely "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

To a world of people saying, "God, I defy you" or "God, I don't need you," it would be easy enough for the Lord to turn His back on a sinful world, say a word and watch it vanish in a puff of smoke, or at least say, "I'll go ahead and let you raise yourselves from the dead." But as we heard with wonder on Holy Wednesday of this past week, "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus, the Lord of life, became flesh to walk among the living dead. Not only that, but He came to pay the wages of sin, to raise the dead to life. To do so, the Lord of life submitted to death at the hands of the living dead, sinners and violent men and Pharisees and all; for if He did not die that final death for them, they would have to do it themselves – and they could never survive death.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us. When sinners mauled Jesus and nailed Him to a cross, He died for them. But death could not hold Him, and now Christ has been raised from the dead.

Christ became flesh to live among the living dead, and die their death, to give them life forever.

He has lived among the living dead so that you might live forever! Risen again, He is not out for vengeance but peace and grace! The angels don't say, "He has risen – na-na-na-na-naa!" He's risen to save, and to save you! That is why He has joined you to His death and resurrection in your baptism. You are no longer the living dead, waiting to become the dead dead. You are a new creation, waiting to be raised up in glory! You are already His child; and much like grown men and women hardly resemble the boys and girls they once were, what you will be has not yet appeared. But you are joined to Christ's death and resurrection, and He promises to raise up His penitent people to eternal life with glorious, incorruptible bodies that will never know death again.

With that in mind, I would ask you to examine yourself. I could be wrong, but I am guessing that those who come to church on an Easter Sunday morning are not a particularly violent and murderous group that seek to spit in the face of God and man. In fact, I'm supposing that you even take those first three commandments at least somewhat seriously. Nevertheless, you will want to hold on to your pet sins that seem to cause no harm, and you will write off others as the cost of doing business; and when you do commit some sort of offense, you will be quick to justify yourself. It is the reaction of your old, dead sinful nature that still clings, not the new creation that Jesus has made you to be.

When you *are* hesitant to repent, I would ask this: if you know not to seek the living among the dead, why do you continue to seek life in death? That ought not be. Sin will not enliven you; and while

some sins might make you “feel more alive” for a bit, they are still killing you. On the other hand, Christ – who died for you – has life for you. Eternal life.

How do you know this to be true? Because He is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

So live as one who rejoices that Christ is risen indeed! You’ve heard the Lord proclaim it in His Word; so as outlandish as the resurrection might sound, and even if an apostle says it’s idle talk, you know better. And knowing better, remember that *you* are now the living among the dead; so let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

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Furthermore, live in hope. Live in this hope: your dead are among the living.

I speak of the saints who have gone before us, your friends and loved ones who died in the faith.

Sometime in the past couple of months, I passed a milestone of sorts: I presided at my hundredth funeral. I’ve made more trips to cemeteries than I will ever make to my favorite restaurant. I’ve seen many of God’s people laid to rest. I have found great joy in proclaiming the resurrection of the body for the sake of Jesus, and I have found great satisfaction in kicking death in the teeth.

Many of you lack that frequency of funeral attendance, but you have suffered a far greater intensity: you’ve made that trip to lay to rest a dear friend, a loved one, a spouse ... a child. In the midst of life we are in death, goes the old medieval chant, and a cemetery and a gravestone – and the absence and silence that follow – preach that sermon loud and clear. Death wants to posture and bully and keep you convinced that it always wins.

Except that it doesn’t. Death is a liar, and you know why because you know Christ: Christ who died and Christ who rose and lives again.

Death had ahold of Jesus – had Him expired on a cross and buried in a tomb. But the Holy One did not see corruption: He rose from the dead. He didn’t sneak out while death was taking a nap, but He broke out of the grave – and broke the grave so badly that it can’t hold onto any of His people either. Death is hardly the victor. It is defeated and under Jesus’ feet. For now, the Lord permits it to remain and do His bidding, to deliver His people to His glorious kingdom. On the Last Day, death will be destroyed, for the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Until that day, death still haunts and frightens and preaches the wages of sin. But it does not win. In the midst of death we are in life, for Christ has conquered death. Until the Resurrection, cemeteries are where the bodies of His saints sleep; but even now, they live in Christ, and Christ lives forevermore.

Your dead (who died in the Christian faith) are among the living, standing before the throne in glory. Death is not the end for them and death is not the end for you. Because you are redeemed by the blood of Christ, you are among the living both now and forevermore.

Why? Because He is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

He *is* risen indeed.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen