

April 17, 2022
The Resurrection of our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 24:1.12

The Empty Tomb: A Place of Remembering

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 24th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

It's easy to get distracted at Easter. There is so much going on: coloring eggs and Easter egg hunts, extra worship services, songs of praise, and the celebration of Christ's Resurrection. It is easy to get distracted in all the fuss and celebration of Easter, but our Gospel text focuses our attention on *remembering*.

Jesus had explicitly told His followers that He would be put to death in Jerusalem and after three days rise from the dead. (cf: Mark 10:33–34) But at His death, nobody *remembers* what He had said. Nobody expected that He would come out of the tomb alive. Not even His closest followers. As Jesus breathed His last on the cross on Good Friday, His closest disciples had all abandoned Him. Another disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, took His body off the cross. Then, he and Nicodemus prepared the body for burial. They were so sure that Jesus was going nowhere as they wrapped the body in linin saturated with 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. (cf: John 19:38–42)

The three women who went to the tomb on the first day of the week were just as certain what would be found at the tomb. Resurrection morning was overwhelming. Following their Sabbath rest, the unbelieving women hurried off to the tomb early in the morning carrying their burial spices. (cf: Luke 23:56–24:1) They needed to complete their act of love and devotion before the body began to decay. They did not *remember* Jesus' words.

They expected to find Roman guards, a stone covering the entrance to the tomb, and the dead body of Jesus. But they found the opposite. The guards were gone, the stone had been rolled away, and Jesus' body was missing. (cf: Luke 24:1–3) St Luke records that the women were perplexed. (cf: Luke 24:4) But perplexed was but the beginning of a whole gamut of emotions they were about to experience. They are about to discover that in finding nothing in the tomb is the greatest find of all: that Jesus is risen from the dead.

From perplexed to frightened, the women suddenly encounter two men, who we know are angels, who said:

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee.” (Luke 24:4–6)

The women had never seen these men before and yet, somehow, the men know *what* the women are seeking – or better yet – *who* they are seeking. And even more peculiar is that the men even know what Jesus had previously told the women, telling them to *remember*.

In the midst of the emotional rollercoaster, Luke focuses *our* attention on one simple act of the women. He writes:

“And they remembered his words.” (Luke 24:8)

On Resurrection morning, God sent angels to the tomb to help His people *remember*. This morning through Holy Scripture, we also *remember* His words. God has made the empty tomb a place of *remembering*. The empty tomb reminds us we can truly rejoice in the Resurrection of our Savior.

Remembering can change lives. When you remember past events, things begin to change. They can change in two different ways. First, *remembering* can take us away from our *present* and lead us into that *past*. That is what happens at funerals. Family and friends gather at the casket and begin to *remember*. *“I remember that he always wanted to help.”* Or *“I remember that she was such a caring listener and a good shoulder to cry on.”*

Soon, everyone who is gathered is taken from their *present grief* and taken back to a place where things are *relaxed*, where faces brighten, and where you can hear laughter, even at a funeral. It is the power of *remembering*. It can take you away from the present to the comfort of the past.

On the other hand, there’s another kind of *remembering* that doesn’t take you *away* from the *present* but focuses you *in* the *present* with *confidence* and *peace*. It has been said that if you do not learn from your past mistakes, you are bound to repeat them. It is how you grow and mature, not only as an adult, but also in your life as a Christian. By *remembering* that God has actively and graciously sustained you in the past, even when things appeared dire, even in spite of your sinfulness, you can have the *confidence* and *peace* that He is active in your life today, working all things according to His will. (cf: Romans 8:28)

Two types of *remembering*: one that takes you *away* from the present into the past, and the other which brings you *confidence* and *peace* in the present. Which type of *remembering* happens on Easter? As God comes to you this morning in His liturgy and in His Word and Sacrament, does He take you away from the present into the past or does He bring *confidence* and *peace* in the *present* and on into the *future*? Perhaps it is both/and, for Jesus is the beginning and the end:

“... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

At the tomb, *remembering* the Lord’s words brings the women *confidence* and *peace*. It’s an *“ah ha”* moment. *Remembering* Jesus’ words, everything starts to make sense... the stone rolled away... the empty tomb... angels who know their intentions. It makes sense! Jesus had talked about a heavenly kingdom. The world is God’s, and His kingdom has come into their presence.

Suddenly the crucifixion no longer seemed a horrible mistake. Jesus had told them that He was necessary that He suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day be raised from the dead. (cf: Luke 9:22) It was the Father's will that Jesus be handed over and put to death. Because He desires all people to be saved, He gave His only Son to take the punishment for their sin. And now, ***"It is finished."*** (John 19:20) God's divine vengeance is done, and the open grave gives the women a glimpse of heavenly joy. Suddenly, for the them, life had become worth living again. Finding nothing in the tomb is the greatest find of all. Christ is risen from the dead and now they can live in ***confidence*** and ***peace*** in the grace of Jesus.

On Easter Day, the Church ***remembers*** the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ because this event is ***FOR YOU***. It is God's gracious work of redemption and salvation for all mankind. And by ***remembering*** that Christ is risen from the dead you live in ***confidence*** and ***peace*** in the grace of Jesus, both now and forever more. All of us have sins in our past that make us afraid of going on. Anger at your boss has broken your working relationship. Gossip has made friends your enemies. A broken marriage, a broken childhood, or a broken relationship with God.

When you ***remember*** these things, life gets confusing and you don't know how to press forward. It seems that your past has destroyed your future. But God comes to you and speaks through His Word. ***Remember*** when Jesus said:

"¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

God's Word reminds you that Christ is risen from the dead and He has destroyed sin, death, and the threats of the devil. While the devil wants you to ***remember*** your past so that you wallow in your transgression, God's Word causes you to ***remember*** this present reality, that Jesus' death on the cross and His empty tomb mean salvation for all who believe. It's yours because Jesus shed His blood – FOR YOU.

There are some who say that for the Church to remain alive and vibrant, it needs to make God more relevant. But what is more relevant than – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us? (cf: Romans 5:8) If you are dying from a disease, what's more relevant to you than a physician who can heal your disease? You and I are dead in our trespasses. The most relevant thing for a dead person is the God who raised Jesus from the dead. He breathes life into your dead soul and makes it alive and nourishes you with His medicine of immortality. He forgives your sins and on the Last Day He will raise you unto eternal life.

God has given you His word recorded in Holy Scripture so that you remember and trust His Word and promises. He certainly ***remembers***:

- After He destroyed all flesh in the Great Flood, (cf: Genesis 6:17) God ***remembered*** Noah and all the animals in the ark and brought them safely out of the ark. (cf: Genesis 8:1)
- After Noah exited the ark, God put a rainbow in the sky so He would ***remember*** His covenant between Himself and every living creature on the earth – and you and I ***remember*** that God is faithful and just. (cf: Genesis 9:16; 1 John 1:9) He is faithful to His promises and always keeps His Word.

- God **remembered** Abraham so He saved Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom for Abraham's sake. (cf: Genesis 19:29)
- God heard the groaning of the children of Israel and **remembered** His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So he sent Moses to lead them out of bondage. (cf: Exodus 2:23-24, 3:10)
- God even **remembers** and cares for the sparrows. Not one of them is forgotten. (cf: Luke 12:6)
- God **remembered** His Holy covenant He swore to Abraham, and He sent His Son Jesus to deliver mankind from its slavery in sin. (cf: Luke 1:72-74).

Today, we **remember** and celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. The empty tomb is a place of **remembering** that God accepted Jesus' sacrificial death on your behalf. In a few minutes you'll receive our Lord's body and blood given and shed – FOR YOU – for the forgiveness of your sins, by which our Lord will **remember** His promises to you: to cleanse you from all unrighteousness for the sake of Jesus; and in **your remembering**, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again. (cf: 1 Corinthians 11:25–26)

Interestingly enough – there's only one thing that God promises not to **remember**. Through His prophet Isaiah He says:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.” (Isaiah 65:17)

You can live in **confidence** and **peace** in the grace of Jesus that whoever:

“... is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For the sake of Jesus, you have God's promise when He says:

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” (Hebrews 10:17)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.