

# “Looking for Easter”

**Pastor Rich Knight**  
**Trinitarian Congregational Church**  
**March 31, 2013**  
**Luke 24:1-12**

This text calls Sunday the first day of the week, which it was back then. Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, was the 7th day, the last day of the week. Our calendars still reflect this, as Sun. is all the way out on the left at the start of the week. Let's take a look.

## **Luke 24:1-12**

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

This message is entitled, “Looking for Easter.”

You know, great literature is filled with great lines. That's obviously what makes great literature - a high use of language, an artistic use of words.

- “*It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.*”
- “*To be or not to be that is the question.*”

Great Dramas have great lines:

- “*If you build it, they will come*” - “*Field of Dreams*”
- “*Frankly Scarlet, I could . . . care less.*”
- “*No Buzz, I am your Father.*” (Zurg to Buzz Lightyear)

Great moments in history have great lines.

- *"We hold these truths to be self-evident"*
- *"Four score & seven years ago . . ."*
- *"I have a dream today."*

Great moments. Great words.

Turning Points in our lives are often accompanied by memorable lines.

- *"Have you ever thought about going into teaching?"*
- *"Would you maybe, possibly, perhaps go out with me sometime?"*
- *"Will you marry me?"*

The most important moments in our lives have unique and perfect words:

- *"I now pronounce you husband & wife."*
- *"It's a boy!" "It's a girl." "It's twins."*

Great moments. Great lines. You see this in our text this morning. On that first Easter, the women rose quite early in the morning. Jesus of course had women followers, women disciples. - Mary & Martha & Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others. This was unheard of for a Rabbi in Jesus' day.

These women rose quite early in the morning. They had something they needed to do - anoint the body of Jesus with the proper spices. He had been taken down from Good Friday's Cross late in the day. The Sabbath was approaching. The Jewish Sabbath began Friday at sundown. So Jesus' friends had not able to give him a proper burial on Good Friday. So they needed to go to the tomb. How faithful that they awoke very early - early dawn - to carry out this final act of love and devotion.

Where were the male disciples, by the way? Oh they were up early, too. They were golfing! Truth be told - they were hiding. (they were in the "upper room" with the doors and windows locked up tight)

So the women get to the tomb and they notice that the stone has been rolled away. Mark tells us that on the way to the tomb they had been asking themselves, *"Who will roll away the stone for us?"* Tombs back then as you probably know were caves. The doors of the tombs were large stones - think millstone. This round stone door was placed within a track and rolled over the entrance of the cave to seal it. It could only be opened from the outside - which is usually all you need with that sort of thing. The women were wondering, how will we be able to roll the large stone away from the entrance & get inside? Matthew tells us that it was an angel of the Lord who rolled back the stone. That would seem quite fitting, given this divine event.

So the women arrive at the tomb and the stone is rolled away. They go inside and it's empty. The body of Jesus is gone. They're stunned - they can't imagine what's happened. In the midst of their confusion two men in dazzling clothes - suddenly come and stand beside the women. And on this day, the greatest of all days, there is a great line:

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen!"*

Great moments, great lines.

You know, one of the easiest and best ways to read the Bible is to simply look for the great lines!

- *"For God so loved the world . . .*
- *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"*
- *"Jesus Christ is the same - yesterday, today and forever."*
- *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."*
- *"Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*

Look for the great lines in the Bible and then spend some time with them, meditate on them, let them resonate in your mind and soul, so they speak in a fresh way from God to you.

So let's spend some time with this great line from Luke 24. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The women were looking for Jesus in a tomb. They were looking for him in a burial place, in a place for the dead. Many people still have Jesus in a tomb today.

**1. For example, a lot of folks simply view Jesus Christ as the greatest man who ever lived, the loveliest life that ever appeared here on earth.**

No argument here about the unique beauty of his life, but Jesus is much more than a noble hero from the past. He is a living reality in the present. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

**2. Other people view Jesus of Nazareth as someone to be studied - his teachings, his words, his culture, his impact - the search for the Historical Jesus.**

This view of Christ is quite popular today. He's been doing very well lately - the cover of magazines, CNN specials, The History Channel. People tune in to learn some new tidbits about this monumental person from history. But Jesus is not simply someone to be studied. If Easter is true He's someone to be met.

Illustration. Tony Campolo tells the story of a book his mother gave him when he was growing up, Silver Trumpet by James Wesley Ingles. Tony read the book because his mother gave it to him and told him to read it, but it didn't really impress him very much. A few years later, Tony was a student at Eastern College in St. David's Pennsylvania, and his English professor was a man named James Wesley Ingles. Tony said he was one of the most "inspiring" teachers he ever had; so much so that when Tony was home on break he re-read Silver Trumpet. And this time he saw powerful insights in the book that he had missed the first time around. The difference of course was that he had met the author. And when you know the author, the book comes alive. That's true about the Bible - our spirituality brings life to these pages. And the more you know & love & serve the Author, the better the Book is! Our Savior is not simply someone to be studied. He is someone to be met. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

There is at least one other view of Jesus that still keeps him in the tomb.

**3. And that is Jesus as the Perfect Example for Humanity, the Ultimate Role Model for life.** - which of course he is. But if our Christianity is just that - trying to follow the Perfect Example - then where is the Living Christ in that? Isn't that Christ-less Christianity? - trying to be like Jesus without his help? No wonder it's so dry and frustrating!

Trying to do the things that Christ did is really hard - to love like he loved, to forgive as he forgave, to speak words of truth, wisdom & grace, to walk in his footsteps as a servant, sacrificially giving of yourself time and time again, to be a peacemaker, a justice-maker, and so on. These are extremely difficult tasks, but it's even harder on our own, without him. And we can be tempted to give up.

Illustration. Do you remember how you learned to write? I'll bet most of us learned the same way. We were given pieces of paper with gorgeous, cursive handwriting at the top of each page. And below these gorgeous letters there were lines for us to practice. The difference between our letters and the perfect standard was immense, especially when we were first learning. Even when we tried to simply trace over the perfect letters we couldn't capture it. But remember how the teacher would stop by your desk and gently guide your hand over the pattern, gently showing you how it's done and getting you much closer to the pattern, to the example. That's what Christ does. He is not simply the perfect example, the divine pattern for humanity, he is ever-present One, here to help us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, and to lead us. William Barclay says, "Jesus is not simply a model for life; he is a living presence to help us live."

**“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”** He is not in the tomb. He has risen!

Well, if we're not to look for Jesus in the tomb, then where can we find him? and how can we find him? Good questions for all of us. I'm not into formulas, because there's not one set pattern or formula for each of us to follow to come to know Christ and to grow in him. We each walk our own unique path with God. But there are some things in Luke 24 that can help us each find our way. And they each have to do with Peter.

### **1. I'm impressed with his eagerness.**

Vs. 12 - when Peter heard the report of the women who had been to the tomb, it says, *“Peter got up and ran to the tomb.”* - he went running looking for Easter. Jesus said, *“Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you.”* Seek the living Christ with eagerness, expecting to meet him.

### **2. The next thing it says Peter did was “stoop.”**

He got to the tomb and stooped to look in. I know it means that he physically stooped. But the Bible has a lot to say about another kind of stooping - bowing our hearts, our lives before God. *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and God will lift you up.”*

You know, following his Resurrection Jesus didn't appear to Herod, to Pontious Pilate, to Caesar Augustus. He didn't go see the proud. He went only to his humble followers. There's probably a message there. Harold Kushner says, *Faith begins “with a sense of reverence, the recognition of God's greatness and our limitations.”* Peter stooped.

### **3. And the final thing it says about Peter, was that he was amazed that first Easter.**

As he went on his way he was amazed at what had happened. We don't get amazed much anymore. We've got things pretty well figured out. It's all about scientific studies and theories, technology, computers & spreadsheets. But the Bible says this about the Early Christians - *“They were filled with awe.”* When was the last time you were filled with awe? Easter is our invitation to awe.

What if it's really true? What if Jesus truly was the Son of God, crucified willingly out of love for us and raised in this day?

- raised to give us new life here and now
- raised to give us eternal life forever

What if that is the Gospel truth? You know, if you've been feeling spiritually dead, it may be because you've haven't gotten to Easter yet, and your Savior is still in the tomb. You're looking for the living among the dead.

Illustration. I'll close with a famous illustration from Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, founder of Existential philosophy. Kierkegaard believed that commitment was at the heart of faith. He believed in people making a decision to believe and to follow. He called this decision a "leap of faith." He illustrated this leap of faith with the story of a man trapped on the edge of a cliff with a raging fire burning toward him. In a very short amount of time, he will be consumed by the fire. But suddenly he hears a voice from below the cliff calling to him out of the darkness. "Jump" the voice says. The man answers, "But I can't see you. There's only darkness down there!" The voice from the deep shouts back, "Jump anyway. I can see you!"

The living Christ can see you. If you've never jumped to him, what better day than today?

What I'm encouraging you to do today is have faith in a Living Jesus, not a dead one. Imagine how amazing life would be with a Living Jesus?

If you're wondering about the love of God, can you picture Jesus reaching out to you? If you're going through a difficult time, can you picture Christ at your side? Can you imagine the joy of living every day in the presence of the Living Christ? Imagine what worship would be like if we truly understood that Christ is here in this place with us.

- how would we sing if we knew Jesus were here?
- how would I preach if I knew Jesus was right here?
- how would we pray if we knew Jesus was here?
- and how would the choir sing if they knew Jesus was right here?
- imagine the joy that would be in this place if we only believed that Christ was right here, right now.

Well, Christ is here!!!!

The Lord is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed!

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, you died and rose so that we might rise to new life as well. Teach us to embrace you in the present, to look for you among the living.

Walk with us each day. With your hand, gently guide us. With your Spirit boldly empower us, with your love renew us and remake us into our true selves. Help us each to take that Leap of Faith and say, "Yes, Lord, I believe and I will follow. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.