

EASTER: FINDING NOTHING AND BELIEVING EVERYTHING  
 Luke 24:1-12; Easter 1C; April 20, 2025

**On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] went to [Jesus'] tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.**

**P** Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**C** He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

St. Luke presents his Easter account as historical fact. To establish something as a fact you have verifiable evidence. What are the facts of Easter? Jesus died on the cross and was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. Those who claim that Jesus somehow was not dead when buried have no evidence of that. Pilate's soldiers were expert executioners; they verified that Jesus was dead before Pilate gave Joseph permission to bury him.

The women who witnessed Jesus' death as well as His burial could verify this. Today's Easter Gospel gives some of their names. **"It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them"** who saw Jesus dead and buried, who returned to finish His embalming with the spices they had prepared. The fact of Jesus' death and burial is supported by irrefutable historical evidence.

What is the evidence of His resurrection? The women did not find the body of the Lord Jesus in the tomb, though the linen cloths that had been wrapped around His dead body when He was laid there were still there. The two angels God sent explained why the women did not see and find the dead body of Jesus. **"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, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."**

That Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and rose on the third day for us and for our salvation is our faith, but knowing the facts does not necessarily mean we believe this.

The women who went to Jesus' tomb for His burial and on Easter morning, went both times believing that Jesus was dead. They left after the first tomb visit with the full assurance that Jesus was truly dead based on what they had seen at the cross and grave, but not the second time they visited His tomb. Something changed them. They returned from their second trip to the tomb with the faith that Jesus was not dead, but alive, risen from the dead.

This faith was not based on seeing Jesus alive, any more than our faith is. Have you ever seen Jesus, dead or alive? I haven't and no one I know has. Our faith in Jesus is not based on sight. God's Word says: **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen** (Heb. 11:1). Or this Scripture: **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ** (Rom. 10:17). This is true for all of us just as much as it was true those faithful women at the empty tomb of Jesus. What did they see in their unbelief?

First, the women saw that His body was not there in the tomb, and this perplexed them because there was no doubt of the fact of His death and burial three days before. Second, they saw the angels in dazzling apparel, but that only frightened them. Then the angels spoke, announcing to them that Jesus was not dead, but alive, and that they should remember what He had told them earlier: that He would be delivered to death on a cross and rise on the third day. Hearing this Word of Good News they believed in a risen Jesus as their Savior.

How do we know that they came to faith? They went and told the eleven remaining apostles and the rest of the disciples what they believed. What Christians believe in their hearts they confess to others with their mouths. The women at the empty tomb were the first believers in the risen Jesus Christ based not on what they had seen, but on what they had heard.

There is a stark contrast between the women and those they confessed this true faith to. **And [the women] remembered [Jesus'] words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest... but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.**

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

I assume that you are in church this Easter morning because you believe in Jesus: that He suffered and died on the cross for your sins, rose from the dead on the third day to declare you righteous before God, and will raise you from the dead one day. How did you come to this faith? It was not by seeing Jesus either dead or alive.

If you ever have the opportunity to visit Jerusalem, you will be directed to two different locations claiming to be Jesus' empty tomb: at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher ("sepulcher" is from the Latin word for "bury") or Gordon's Garden Tomb. What is true about both tombs is that you will find nothing in them. You can peer into both, and you won't see the body of Jesus in either.

Seeing an empty tomb does not create faith in the risen Christ. Seeing angels causes fear in people, or wonder, but not faith. Hearing the Good News of Jesus with our ears or receiving them through God's written Word creates faith. This faith in Jesus is the work of God the Holy Spirit in us, not a conclusion we arrive at after considering the evidence. Faith is a gift from God that believes and clings to the truth.

Not everyone has faith in Jesus. When the believing women reported back to the apostles and others what they had heard from the angels and remembered about what Jesus had said earlier, they were not believed. Luke says that the women's **words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.** The word translated as "idle talk" is the root of our word "delirious." Their good confession was treated as something imagined, nonsense detached from reality. The apostles' disbelief of the women's words was to their shame. God's Word of Christ should never be dismissed whoever we hear it from. For them to dismiss what the women said was to deny the Word of Christ that they too had heard earlier, a sign of their unbelief.

On Easter we see in church many people we don't often see here. Some are family members returning home from out of town. Others are people who don't belong to a congregation but think it's important to attend especially at Easter or Christmas. Some are church members who don't come to church very often but do on special occasions. I'm glad that all of you are here today. You get to hear the Good News that Jesus died for you, was buried in the tomb, and rose from the dead on the third day.

Something that faith needs is encouragement and strengthening through the hearing of God's Word and receiving the Sacrament of Jesus' body and blood. We need to keep hearing and learning God's Word if we are to remember it for faith. The angels' words to the women stressed this: "**Remember how [Jesus] 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.**" **And they remembered His words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.**

The world out there thinks that the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection is silly nonsense to be dismissed as idle talk. Our own sinful flesh is weak and prone to doubts and unbelief, especially when confronted with our sinful failures, which we don't want to admit or take responsibility for. We can lose our faith if it is not guarded.

What I have noticed about people who show up for church only on Christmas or Easter is that, if they don't start attending regularly, they eventually stop coming to church at all. They don't feel they need to hear God's Word and remember what Jesus has done for them. This shows a lack of faith in Jesus. They don't think they need what comes from hearing God's Word and receiving Jesus' body and blood, which is the definition of unbelief, not being a Christian.

Based on the facts they knew, the women went to tomb that first Easter expecting to see the body of the dead Jesus, but they found nothing. You won't see Jesus here today either. What they heard from the angels about Jesus' resurrection and the reminder that He said all this, gave them faith in the risen Christ, which they confessed, even though it was not well-received at first. We have heard the angels' announcement that the body of Jesus is not dead in the tomb but has risen. We have been reminded of Jesus' words and what He has done for us. We have heard everything we need to have faith in Jesus, faith that will bring us to church often to hear the Good News, receive the Sacrament, confess our faith in Jesus, and go out from here proclaiming that good news to all those around us.

**P** Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**C** He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.