

+ Luke 24:4-8 + Ironies of the Passion: Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?<sup>1</sup> +  
+ The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Dawn + 27 March 2016 +

**CIR HIRI!**<sup>2</sup> Dear Fellow Followers of Our Living Lord,

Imagine that you're driving around looking for someone's address. You keep looking at your directions or your GPS. You peer at street signs, but you just can't find it. You start getting frustrated and a little less charitable towards whoever gave you the directions, positioned the streets signs, or programmed that silly electronic device that keeps leading you astray. Then you spot someone walking along the road. You pull up and ask them, "Can you tell me where so and so lives? The house is supposed to be right here!" The person looks around, but all you can see for acres in every direction are tombstones. He doesn't know what to say. You're looking for the living among the dead! Now you probably won't ever get that lost, but this morning we find a group of women looking for Jesus in a cemetery where an angel asks them, "**Why do you look for the living among the dead?**"

The women weren't confused. They simply went back to the last place anyone had seen Jesus—the tomb where his dead body had been placed. Where else would he be? The women had gotten up early because they didn't want to leave Jesus' body without the proper burial preparations, and they didn't have funeral directors to take care of such things.

They wondered how they would get into a tomb that was sealed by a large rock. Yet when they got to the cemetery, the stone was rolled away! The Roman guards were gone! Inside they found grave clothes, but no body. Suddenly two men in shining robes—two angels—appeared. "**Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!**"

Do those words sound harsh? It is true that the women should've known better than to come looking for a dead Jesus. They should've known he would be alive on Easter morning. Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly that he was going to die and then rise, but they never seemed to understand what he was talking about. That's why the angel asked the women why they didn't understand what Jesus had promised.

You and I are more sympathetic to the women. Unlike the angels, we're sinners. You and I have been wrong so many times about so many things that we can totally understand why the women never grasped the promise Jesus had made. After all, who comes back from the dead?

No one comes back from the dead three days after they die, unless Jesus has raised them. Just a couple weeks before Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead after four days. Jesus had raised others. The women knew that. Those miracles had shown that Jesus had power over life and death. That's why the angels reminded the women, "**Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'**" Yet doubting they still thought Jesus was dead.

You can identify with those humble women who loved their Lord. Your faith is often weak as is mine. When you hurt, when life seems impossible, when death stares you in the face, your natural response is to try to cope. It's natural to tell yourself that death is just a part of life. It's natural to wrap yourself in sorrow and focus only on the practical needs at hand. You and I can easily forget about Jesus and his promises.

Are we that different from the women when they looked for their Lord in a tomb? The angels owe us the same rebuke, but remember what they said in the very next breath: "**He is not here; he has risen!**"

In his great love, Jesus did the impossible. He died on the cross and paid for your sin and then rose from the dead. Now death can't win in your life. All who die trusting in Jesus will live with him forever—even if your faith is weak. Day by day, the good news of the resurrection changes your heart. That good news is the source of strength for your faith, especially when life hurts and you're faced with the reality of death.

So if Jesus isn't in a tomb anymore, where can you find him? God wants you to find Jesus in the Word that's preached and taught to you. You find him in your Bible. You find him in Baptism, where he washed your sins

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was adapted with permission from a 2016 Lenten sermon series created by Pr. Geoffrey Kieta and published by Northwestern Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, "*Christ is risen!*", they automatically respond loudly and boldly, "*He is risen indeed!*"

away, and in Communion, where you receive his actual body and blood.

Yet that isn't where you and I naturally look for him. All too often, when your faith is weak, when you're dissatisfied, when you feel guilty and foolish and unproductive, you look for Jesus in all the wrong places. You want to find him in your heart. You look for him in your feelings. You feel a need to hear him speak to you in all the little miracles that happen day after day.

...But that isn't where the angel told the women to look. He told them to remember what Jesus had said to them. He told them to remember that Jesus died and rose for them. He says the same thing to you. Rather than look inside for God to speak to you there, Jesus is found right where he said he would be: in the Gospel, in the good news that **CIR HIRI!**

That's why the angels repeated the message Jesus had told his disciples over and over again: "***The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.***" Jesus' followers had all forgotten that message. They were sinners, just like we are. So when Jesus was crucified, their hearts broke, and all they could do was carry on with concrete tasks like preparing his body for burial. Jesus' words were the power of God, but his followers failed to understand.

Jesus came to die, because our hearts are sinful, because we look for Jesus in foolish places, because God basically has to drag us, kicking and screaming to his Word and Sacraments. Jesus died because your faith is weak, because every sinful heart deserves to die and spend eternity in hell. Yet when he died, he paid for every sinful heart—including yours and mine.

That's what makes Easter Sunday so amazing! Jesus overcame our sinful hearts when he overcame death. On Easter Sunday, Jesus rose! His resurrection is God's proof that Jesus did all that he had come to do. Jesus' resurrection proves that he paid for every one of your sins and mine. Your account is clear. Your record is clean. Jesus lives!

Because Jesus lives, that will always be true for you. God doesn't hold over you your weaknesses or the failures that torment your heart. God calls you perfect because Jesus lives! God has even promised that you will rise. Death won't be able to hold you, because one day you will live with Jesus forever.

That's what the angel meant when he said, "***Remember what he told you.***" Luke tells us, "***Then they remembered his words.***" Suddenly, it all came flooding back. What did they remember? They remembered Christ's promise of eternal life. That's where the power is, and when the women heard it, they believed. When they remembered Jesus' promise and finally understood that he had kept it, they began to trust in all God's promises.

Christ's victory over death brings you back to life. You don't have to look for him among the dead, but he looked for you in a spiritual graveyard. Your heart was dead in sin, but Christ's resurrection is more powerful than sin or death. It creates new life. It changes who and what you are as Jesus continually comes to you. He comes in his Holy Supper. He comes in his gift of Baptism. He comes every time you hear his Word. That way you keep growing in your faith through the good news that **CIR HIRI!** That makes all the difference in the world since it means you will live with him forever.

Celebrate the fact that Jesus' tomb is empty. Celebrate the fact that God rolled the stone away and the women heard the greatest proclamation of all time: ***He is not here. He has risen just as he said.*** Jesus kept his promise. You don't have to go to a cemetery to find him. You don't need to tend his grave. Jesus lives! Your sins are wiped out and forgotten. Jesus lives! You will live with him forever. Jesus lives! New life is yours and always will be, because Jesus lives! **CIR HIRI!** Amen.