

**+ Luke 24:1-8 + Focus on Christ Who Lives to Save!¹ +
+ Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Dawn +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 16 April 2017 +**

CIR HIRI!²

You expect it to snow a lot in Syracuse, but spring to eventually come—especially after Mother’s Day. You expect the Syracuse men’s basketball team to be competitive. You expect to find cheeseburgers at McDonalds. You came to church this morning expecting fragrant flowers, special music, and a pastor preaching. You expect all these things and you normally find them.

Yet aren’t there times when things take an unexpected turn? We get a stretch of 70s in the middle of February or a whiteout blizzard well after Easter. The Orange go above and beyond and end up in the Final Four. You expect just another worship service when suddenly a single sentence or a phrase in a hymn hits you out of nowhere, and suddenly it’s like you’re cutting onions.

When you step back and take a look at Luke’s account of the first Easter, you realize that Easter is something totally unexpected, yet something every one of us still needs. So for a few moments let’s turn away from the business of everyday life and **FOCUS ON CHRIST WHO LIVES TO SAVE.**

Luke’s account of Easter morning begins exactly as you would expect. **“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, [the women] came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared.”** The women had been dear friends and supporters of Jesus and his ministry. Some were mothers of his disciples. They supplied food and clothing for Jesus with their own money. Most of them made up the small handful who stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross. They displayed their loyalty and love for Jesus in their lives.

...But where were those faithful women going so early that Sunday morning? They were going to a tomb. Now no one likes cemeteries, so we try to make them “nice” with beautiful flowers or landscaping or tombstones. Yet deep down inside, we all know that you can’t make death any better with pretty flowers and a well-manicured lawn. Now Jesus’ tomb was brand new—loaned to him by the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, but even that Cadillac tomb could not compensate for the fact that Jesus’ battered, lifeless body lay inside on a cold stone slab. What a dreadful end Jesus had endured!

Yet those faithful women would make the best of it. They wanted to provide Jesus with some basic human dignity. Jesus had received a quick burial on Good Friday. On Saturday evening, after the Sabbath rest was over, the women went shopping for burial spices—myrrh and aloes. They planned to go back to the tomb, lovingly clean Jesus’ bloody body and gently sprinkle it with spices, tightly wrap his body with clean linen, tenderly place a burial cloth on his face, and let their beloved Teacher rest in peace. Then they would return to a life that was going to be dreadfully different without Jesus.

This is all so ordinary! A dead man, a tomb, and a group of mourners wanting to say a final, fitting farewell, but then something happened that the women didn’t expect: **“They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.”** They hadn’t hesitated to go back to the tomb at the crack of dawn. As they rounded the final bend into the garden, the women saw the unexpected! The stone had been rolled away! Who could have possibly gotten here earlier? Who could have opened the tomb? What in the world was going on!? The women stepped into the tomb and experienced the first Easter.

Luke tells us, **“They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes.”** Instead of grave clothes, they found men dressed in dazzling light! Instead of a cold corpse, they found angelic messengers. The rocky slab where Jesus’ lifeless body lay became the first Easter ambo. Instead of the silence and stillness of death, they heard a sermon—short, sweet, and to the point. **“He is not here, but he has risen!” CIR HIRI!**

“Now wait a minute, Pastor! Did you just say that a dead man literally rose from the dead?” To be honest, I didn’t say it. Angels said it. In fact, Jesus himself had said it! The angels said, **“Remember how he told you!”** Whether

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² “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 respond loudly and boldly, “He is risen indeed!”

or not you personally believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead doesn't change the fact that Easter actually happened. Turn away from your doubts and focus on Jesus who lives to save!

Allow me to play devil's advocate for a moment. Let's say Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Let's say the women were delusional and the angels were myth. Let's even say that Luke made all this up. What are you left with?

You're left with sin. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."** (1 Corinthians 15:17) If Christ has not been raised, then when Jesus said, **"It is finished"** on the cross (John 19:30), he was just saying he was finished, nothing about saving you. A dead savior is a dead deception, a buried dream. No, if Jesus is still dead, then you've got a huge problem called sin, and every one of us knows, whether we admit it or not, that **"the wages of sin is death."**

Now if Jesus is still dead, then you can have no hope when you take your own personal trip to a funeral home someday. Paul writes, **"For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised... Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished."** (1 Corinthians 15:16,18) If Christ has not been raised, then the funeral home is a hopeless end to this life and the beginning of that nagging reality that you find in your conscience and in the Bible—something about a place of eternal separation from God's love called hell. If Christ has not been raised, then the mere thought of eternity can only make us shudder!

Finally, if Christ is still dead, then you have no real hope in this life either. Paul says, **"If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith."** (1 Corinthians 15:14) If Jesus is still in his tomb, then this sermon is pointless and your trust in Jesus is foolish. If Christ is still dead, then your life is trivial.

...But Jesus has truly, physically, really been raised from the dead! The Crucified One lives again! God stakes his entire reputation on these historical Easter facts. Luke isn't lying. The women weren't delusional. They were astonished! The angels are actually God's messengers proclaiming the greatest truth of all time. God proclaims his Easter truth so you can have this rock-solid foundation. Through Christ, sin is forgiven. In Christ, death has died. By Christ, Satan has been defeated, and in Christ, life lasts forever! Easter is something totally unexpected, but something we all need!

What is it that you need? You desperately need God's forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross to pay sin's impossible price tag. On the cross, Jesus said that his work of saving you from your sins was finished. Easter is the proof that Jesus' work really works for us! Paul writes elsewhere, **"He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."** (Romans 4:25) Easter is God's declaration to the world that he has forgiven all our sin through Christ. Focus on Christ who died and lives again to forgive every sin for every sinner, including you!

What is it that you need? You need help with death. In Christ, death has been defeated. That means death and the grave are not your grand finale. Because Jesus lives, you can be absolutely certain that death is a sleep from which your living Lord will wake you up on the Last Day. In Jesus, we live even though we die. Focus on Christ whose resurrection ensures yours!

What do you need? You need hope in life. Wars drag on. The economy isn't all that great. We pray about our problems when we go to sleep, but when we wake up, they're often still there. There are plenty of times when it feels like God is floating somewhere out there in space, while your problems feel as close as the nose on your face. Your hope for daily and eternal life isn't placed in a dead guy. No! **CIR HIRI!** That means we have real hope to bring us through this life. The living Lord is with you every second of your life until he brings you to eternal life. Focus on Christ whose life is your life!

So what are you expecting this Easter? I suppose that depends on what you personally believe about the reality of Jesus' resurrection. If forgiveness and victory over death aren't that big of a deal for you, then why bother coming back to worship anytime soon? The best you can hope for today is candy, baskets, ham, and a nap. Yet if Christ truly abandoned his tomb, then you have every reason to worship him as often as you can! The best you can hope for today is forgiveness for all your sins, complete removal of all your guilt, God's truth to drive out your doubts, joy as you live for Jesus now, hope of eternal life in heaven, and the assurance that you yourself will rise again. Until that Day, may our living Savior grant you a living Easter faith that continually focuses on him who lives to save! **CIR HIRI!** Alleluia! Amen.