

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 24:1–12

Sermon: “He Is Risen” Easter 2022

Sometimes a sermon title can be accurate but still communicate the wrong message. I remember one Easter morning on which the pastor’s sermon title read: “He Is Not Here, He Has Risen.” The title came straight from the Bible. (Luke 24:6). Jesus no longer could be found in the tomb. He was not there. The title was accurate. But the sermon came centuries later. The church was full of people waiting to hear that Jesus had risen from the dead and he was there that morning. The title of the sermon needed to be altered just a bit. “Jesus Has Risen! He Is Now Here!” Changing not to now changes everything for us listening today. Confusion and fear give way to a confident faith and hope because Jesus has risen, because He is now here!

But back then, when the women met the angels, they needed to hear Jesus was not in the tomb. They needed to be reminded of Jesus’ words that he would rise from the dead on the third day.

They come to the tomb expecting to care for a dead body. The spices they bring were for embalming the man who died on the cross. When they arrive, they are confused. The stone is rolled off to the side. The tomb contains no body, just emptiness. Where is Jesus? His body had disappeared. They are at a loss as to what had happened.

Then the angels appear. These heavenly beings frighten the women. We sometimes imagine angels as cute, cuddly, babylike cherubs. But most often in the Bible, they are powerful beings that simply send someone to fall to the ground in fear and awe. The women do just that; they bow to the ground in front of the angels.

But the angels aren't there to frighten the women. They have come to assure them, to remind them, to bring a faith back to life in them. They do not do this with power and fear, but with a simple message. Jesus is not in the tomb. He has risen. He has kept his promise. He died at the hands of sinful men. Now, on the third day, he has risen from the dead, just as he said he would. He is not there, in that tomb. The women needed to hear that good news.

What happens next. They remember. They believe. Even though Jesus isn't standing there in front of them, even though all they've seen with their eyes is an empty grave and some angels, they believe. And with an active, living faith, they dash away to tell the disciples that wonderful news of the first Easter morning.

Confusion and fear change to belief and hope. Soon they will see Jesus. They will know just exactly where he is. Not in the tomb. But with them. At that moment, though, Jesus is not there.

I wonder if perhaps we struggle with the same emotions as the women did back then. We're confused. We're frightened. Not at a stone rolled away. Or by encountering angels. But by what life simply throws at us that makes us ask, "Where is Jesus? He doesn't seem to be here. And what is here is frightening."

Look at our own nation, hatred, and violence. The pandemic swept across the nation, around the globe. At first, we locked down together to do battle against this unseen enemy.

We learn how to protect one another and ourselves and keep our health care system from being overwhelmed. But as the months passed, the fighting takes over. Something as simple as a mask divides people into camps, and we hear the battle lines drawn. Personal freedom I don't need to wear one. The virus isn't that bad; 99 percent of those who get it survive. The media has overhyped the problem. We need to get people back to work. The loneliness and depression are worse than the virus. We want to get together for Christmas like we always do.

But wait, doctors and nurses are exhausted. We've run out of ICU beds for those who are sick. Other surgeries must be postponed, and cancer treatments suspended. Protect your neighbor, your family members. Both sides claim political allies. Even in the church, the division raged on, with some not attending if they have to wear a mask, and others not coming if not everyone is wearing a mask. We can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

The church suffers. Attendance goes down. Those who watched at first on the computer begin to drift away. Contributions disappear, and programs and staff need to be cut. Pastors and church workers grow weary and are even attacked for whatever they decide to do. They can't visit people in the hospitals and nursing homes. Many are ready to quit. We can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

But sometimes the confusion and fear come not from the world or the country or even the church. Sometimes they infect us from the close-to-home moments, the death of a loved one. Staring at what age and death do to someone we know makes us realize what it's doing to us as well. The sight can leave us confused, but, even more so, frightened. Where is Jesus when all this happens? We need to hear is that he has risen, and he is here! Yes, he is now here.

Where? Imagine a baptismal font. Before the service, a member of the altar guild comes out and pours water into the basin. A white napkin is placed on the side, along with a baptismal certificate. The service begins and a family, with godparents, sits up front.

The opening hymn ends, and the mom and dad, holding the baby, step to the font. Godparents are standing across from them. The pastor begins the liturgy. Soon the moment comes. The mother lowers her child over the water. Three times the pastor dips his hand into the basin and splashes water on the child's head, all the while speaking the name of the child and the name of the triune God. Where is Jesus at that moment? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and now lives in that child. Faith and hope arise in the child and are renewed in those watching. And we remember once it was each of us who were brought into Jesus' living presence at a baptismal font.

Where is Jesus? Look at the altar. Before the service, again a member of the altar guild brought out a cup and covered it with a white cloth. Wine in the pitcher is set beside it. Communion wafers are readied to be used. The service moves along until the pastor speaks familiar words. ***“On the night when Jesus was betrayed . . . ‘Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you . . . Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’”***

Your pew is ushered forward. You kneel at the rail. The bread is placed in your hand and then your mouth. A sip of wine runs over your tongue. Where is Jesus at that moment? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and lives in you. He renews your faith and hope once again. He is not in the tomb. He is here in our midst, in our church, in our lives. Confusion and fear give way to a confident faith and hope.

Where is Jesus? Open a Bible. Find passages of promise, Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:38–39 and John 11:25–26.

Listen to what Isaiah promises in our Old Testament Reading. A day will come when Jesus will return. We will see him face-to-face. All of creation will be remade. No more will old age take away our strength and breath. All creation will live in peaceful harmony. Only gladness, not more anger and hate. Grief will give way to rejoicing. Listen to Paul in our Corinthians reading. The one great last enemy to be destroyed is death. Jesus is the firstfruits when he left the tomb empty, so many more will follow on that glorious Last Day of resurrection.

Now remember what the women did after the angels reminded them of Jesus' words, after their faith came to life and hope returned. ***“And returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest”*** (v 9). They ran and told the disciples. They didn't stay at the tomb. They went back to their lives. They went back to their lives with the risen Jesus present with them.

So do we. We leave this worship service, a service where Jesus has been present because he promised where two or three or more are gathered together, there he would be. We go back to our lives. We go back to injustice and anger. We go back to division and strife. We go back to sickness and aging muscles. But we do not go back alone. We go back with Jesus. We go back with a powerful message. He has risen; he is now here.

On this Easter morning, listen to the words of the angels: ***“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”*** (vs 6b–7). The women staring at an empty tomb needed to hear the words, ***“He is not here, but has risen”*** (v 6a).

But we, for a living faith and a confident hope, need to hear those words differently. We need to hear this message once again: He has risen! He is now here!

Amen