

March 27, 2016  
Luke 24:1-12

Easter C  
The Empty Tomb: A Place for Remembering

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Risen and Victorious King. Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Easter has for quite some time been my favorite holiday. Easter brings emotion and sometimes commotion. Even from when I was kid and teenager. Waking up early (and I mean early – as a teenager it wasn't top on my list, but now I love it at least on Easter), going to church to help set up the Easter Breakfast...going into the 6 AM SonRise service while the lights are dimmed (I even looked around the area for one that I could attend), hearing the trumpets blare as we sing Jesus Christ is Risen Today, Alleluia! The scent of lilies, the voices of the choir. Then the smell of Easter Breakfast, going into the gym (now the fellowship hall) serving and eating, then back into the sanctuary for a different service at 8 AM. It's a celebratory mood, it's not your typical Sunday. There is something special about it. I love Easter. I have many many fond memories of Easter. The favorite memories I have of Easter are not the big feasts in the afternoon, nor the Easter Baskets, not the Easter Egg Hunts. It's what happens at church. Memories...Easter memories.

Our text for this Easter morning read from Luke focuses our attention on the memories...really on remembering.

Take yourself back to that first Easter and put yourself in that time before the sun came over the horizon. The women got there to finish the burial preparation...they rested on the Sabbath. They had their aromatic spices...but as they got to the tomb, they saw that the stone had been rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. Then...two men standing in glistening clothing said to them, *"Why do you look for the living amongst the dead?"* These men know what has happened: *"He is not here! He is Risen from the dead!"* They even know the past and what was said! *"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."* <sup>1</sup>These men know the women even though they have never met before. There's plenty of emotions and commotion going on, but yet Luke doesn't focus on that. He really calls our attention to one simple act. Verse 8...*and they remembered His Words.* Luke wants us to remember that as we celebrate Easter this morning. On that first Easter morning, when Jesus got up and walked out of the tomb alive, in the midst of the wonder, the awe, the fear, and the worship, His people...namely the women at the tomb, simply and faithfully did one single thing: *"They remembered His Words."*

On that first Easter morning, God sent His angels, His messengers to the tomb to help His people remember, and this morning through His Word He helps us to remember as well. God has made the empty tomb a place of remembering for us this morning in order that we might truly rejoice in what Christ does for us on Easter!

Really though what is Luke trying to do? What is this remembering that we do? You, see memory does many things. Have you ever noticed how a person, friend or foe, can come into your life and with a few simple words change everything? They simply say, "I remember when

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 24:6–7). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

you used to..." or "DO you remember when..." And in that remembering, things begin to change. That's the power of memory. But how do things change? This morning, I would like to consider two ways in which remembering changes our lives.

On the one hand, remembering can take us away from our present and lead us to a world that is past. We often encounter this at funerals. Members of the family gather by the casket (or urn) or the pictures and someone comes and simply begins to remember. In a couple weeks from now, I'll be traveling home not for a happy reason. I'll be doing this sort of remembering as I preach for a memorial service of a long-time family friend. Leona was a widow who lived two-doors down from us and she as a delivery CNA was there when I was born. She really acted as grandma since both of mine lived hours away. I could talk for hours and live in the past. For you see, these people (the griever) taken away from the present to another place, a place where shoulders relax, and weary faces brighten, and you can hear laughter...even at a funeral. Such is the power of remembering. It can you away from the present.

On the other hand, there is another kind of remembering that does not take you away from the present, but brings you more fully into it. This happens with first-time grandparents. The day in the hospital room or at the home of their son or daughter, where they first hold their new grandchild. At first grandma might be nervous. Perhaps it's been a long time since they held a newborn baby. Grandma might even hold the baby awkwardly at first, perhaps even afraid. But after a matter of second, she remembers what it was like. She cradles and rocks and kisses the baby and maybe even says silly things to the baby. Then she looks up and talks about what it was like when you were young. This time, the remembering isn't taking grandma away from the present. It is bringing her more fully into it. Through memory, she is able to delight in the joy of holding her grandchild in her arms.

Two types of remembering, then: that which takes you away from the present and that which brings you more fully into it. The question this morning is what kind of remembering happens at Easter? What happens when God comes among us this morning, and through His Word, helps us remember? Does He take us away from our present or bring us more fully into it?

For these women, remembering the Lord's Words brings them more fully into the present. With the words of Jesus, they begin to understand the strange new world that surrounds them. Empty graves and men standing before them dressed in glistening clothes. Angels who have been with you all your life. These things make sense: Jesus had talked about a heavenly kingdom. The world is God's, and God's kingdom has now come! What about the pain of the crucifixion? Was that all a mistake? NO WAY! Jesus had told them: His betrayal and death were part of God's Will. God so desired to save ALL PEOPLE that He gave His only Son to bear the punishment for their sin. And now, punishment is gone. Divine vengeance is over, and the open grave gives a glimpse of heavenly joy. Angeles talks to humans. Humans speak to one another, sharing a message that saves every man, woman, and child. "God loves YOU! IN love, God gave His life for you! And now HE lives and reigns eternally! Suddenly, life for these women has become worth living and they run from the tomb to live fully in His grace.

Remembering, therefore, can bring us more fully into the present. But our world will tell you differently. Our culture shakes its head at us Christians. It really makes a joke out of us. When we remember Easter, our culture acts as if we have entered the realm of the imagination and lost touch with the present. "A Savior rising from the dead? A world filled with sin and the devil and angels and demons? That's a world with archaic morality and strange views of creation and answers to question that people no longer ask," they say. "Too much of this and you will no longer be able to function. You won't be able to enjoy the good life. You will not get ahead in

business if you try that 'love your neighbor' kind of stuff." That's the world's reaction. But this morning, we've learned that God's ways are not our ways! His thoughts are not our thoughts. When He causes us to remember the resurrection, He does not take away from this world and lock us up in some religious belief system that has no connection to the present. NO, God sets us free to experience life today in His kingdom with deeper meaning.

Today, the church remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus because this event makes life in this world richer and full of meaning. All of us have sins in our past that make us fearful about going on. Anger at your parents, children, friends or fellow church members has fractured a relationship. Gossip about each other has made you enemies. Sin causes brokenness. Broken hearts, broken friendships, broken relationships...including the biggest fracture...the fracture in the relationship with God. These things come to mind, and we are uncertain how we can move on. It seems as if our past has destroyed our future. But God comes to us on this Easter morning and speaks to you and me! He says, "Remember My Son. Jesus. He gave His life for you. Your sins are forgiven. He has risen and rules and is now the author of life. Through Him, you are a child of My kingdom. In Him, you are a member of My family. With Him, your life is now part of my Work in History." When God makes His love known in Jesus, we are freed from our sins and live in God's kingdom. Christ has risen. He has defeated death. He has overcome sin. He is the author of life. Now and forever. And when Jesus is the author of your life, every day deepens in meaning.

As we remember the death and resurrection of our Lord this day, what happened when the women went to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. Did they remember all the things the Lord had told them? The words were an idle tale to them and they did not believe. Why didn't they believe? Perhaps it was because the messengers (the women) were not reliable. In the time of the first Easter women weren't seen as reliable witnesses. No matter why they weren't reliable...God still used their human frailties, He picked them to be the first witnesses of the resurrection. It's as if Jesus didn't care whether they were reliable or not. He made them reliable. He even picks men to share that message who may not seem reliable. Peter...He denied His Lord, He tried to stop Jesus from even going to the cross. Yet, Jesus called Him.

Jesus uses even sinners to cause the church to remember the death and resurrection of our Lord. For even I am not worthy. I'm not outgoing enough, not the friendliest, not the most eloquent, or at times the most reliable. Yet God has chosen me to share this wonderful message this day. For it's not about me...It's about the Risen Lord!

You see, as those women went to the tomb, they went as mourners...but they left celebrating the resurrection. They left as witnesses to something grand. Perhaps even Peter who ran to the tomb, went out of curiosity, but even He too was mourning. And before He came back to the disciples...He too saw His Lord.

You see, when God graciously intervenes and brings people into His Kingdom.. He makes their lives relevant. But it's not because of anything they have done or anything they said or anything in their very being, it's because they are God's, God has chosen them. God has chosen you to be here this morning to make you relevant. He has called you to be here this morning to ask you remember...remember the Passion of our Lord and how He would rise on the third day.

As you ponder the death and resurrection of your Lord and Savior. What memories does it bring up? What do you remember? For me I remember new life in Christ. I remember the sounds and smells of Easter. I remember the love the Christ has for you and me. I remember

that Christ lives and He lives for you. I remember three Easters ago preaching a sermon on this same text at the 10:30 service at my previous parish and bringing out the fact that we need to go back to the beginning...back to our Baptisms where God claims us as His own. This is where we are joined to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. At Baptism is where God makes us His own dearly beloved child. That Easter Sunday, three years ago, I had the privilege of being the hands and mouth of God as Hannah was brought into the family of God. You see, Easter brings back memories. Memories of the past...but also memories that bring is more fully into the present.

What will you remember this Easter? I hope and pray that it is the fact that it is the message of the resurrected Christ. Perhaps the smell of the Easter lily will cause you remember the resurrected Christ, or the moment when one blooms in your garden you remember the resurrected Christ. Perhaps it's the sound of the trumpet that will cause you remember the resurrected Christ. Whatever your memories are of Easter...Remember that Christ is ALIVE FOREVERMORE.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Amen!

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our RISEN LORD AND SAVIOR. Amen.*