

Threatened by Resurrection

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Living God, with joy we celebrate
the presence of your risen Word.
Enliven our hearts by your Holy Spirit
so that we may proclaim the good news
of eternal and abundant life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Scripture: Luke 24:1-12 (NRSVue)

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Threatened by Resurrection

At the dawn's early light—literally at "deep dawn," on the first day of the week, a new day began for the world. Jesus said he would rise, and he did, just as he said. Nothing would be the same.

For the two Marys, Joanna, and the other women, Easter morning began with an ordinary, necessary, yet mournful mission: properly wrap and anoint their Rabbi after his crucifixion. The swift approach of the Sabbath after Friday prevented them from doing so. So early Sunday morning, after the Sabbath rest was over, these women set out to offer their final service to Jesus—reverently concluding the final chapter in their Master's life. But this somber observance suddenly becomes a miraculous moment.

The women find two unusual things: an open tomb and an empty tomb. The women weren't particularly frightened or amazed—just "*perplexed.*" Then suddenly "*two men in dazzling white robes*" appear beside the women. Luke doesn't out and out say they're angels, but by the description it's clear they're not ordinary, but supernatural beings. The women "get it," they're frightened and bow before these angelic messengers.

"Why are you searching for the living among the dead?"

That's a good question. Where are you looking for life, in your life? Are you looking for life in all the wrong places? Dead ends? How is it working for you?

For some reason, we think we'll find life among corrosive cynicism, toxic worry, and unchangeable regrets. And the gospel reminds us: Don't go there. You'll come up empty every time. He's not here. The grave couldn't hold him down. Jesus can't be found here. He has been raised up.

Luke has a unique theme in his gospel—"finding Jesus."

- The shepherds were told they would find Jesus in a manger.
- Mary and Joseph couldn't find Jesus in Jerusalem, but they found him in the temple.
- We hear it in Jesus' "lost" parables: The shepherd leaves his 99 sheep to find the one lost sheep.
- A woman finds a lost coin.
- The Father finds his two lost sons.
- Jesus says in a sermon, "seek and you will find."
- And in his questions, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"
- The women found an empty tomb, but they didn't find Jesus there because the living are not found among the dead.
- Because of their faith, they found Jesus where he couldn't be seen.

Have you found Jesus? Have you been looking for him? Have you been looking in the right places?

Then the angels do something interesting. They call the women to remember.

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?"

The heavenly messengers don't offer new information. They just help the women jog their memories a bit. It was already there.

We need that remembering process too, calling to mind a resurrection faith, recalling and reliving the words and promises of Jesus. Make it your own, keep it fresh and alive. Really notice what you're seeing and experiencing. And in that recalling and recollecting, faith follows. Don't just think your faith through. Also marvel. Be amazed. Be willing to even be perplexed. Ponder it. Ask questions. Get curious. But know this, Christianity is more than you think.

Don't just study about Christ in "the Good Book." Learn at the Living One's feet. Jesus isn't just a hero of the past, but a living presence to encounter. Someone to know, to meet, to converse with. Jesus isn't just an example for us, a model. He lives in us. He lives through us. Make your life a home for Christ. The women at the tomb "*remembered his words*" and so came to believe in the reality of the resurrection. They put two and two together: He Is Risen!

Luke doesn't record that these first witnesses were directed to go and tell the others. Yet the women quickly want to tell this experience and remembrance to "*the eleven and to all the rest.*" The disciples and "*all the rest*" have quite a different response. They dismiss the women's witness as "*an idle tale*" or "nonsense." In fact, the Greek word "*teros*" is the root for the English word "delirious." The disciples thought the report of the women was some form of mass delirium.

They wouldn't believe them. However, Peter was curious enough to actually go to the tomb. But he then simply "went home." He was "amazed," but not particularly persuaded. The women got it, the guys however, were a bit clueless. This shows us events need to be interpreted. Like the women and Peter, we are confronted with a decision. Will we stop or take the green light? Walk across to a new place? On Easter what do we do with the open and empty tomb? Where do we go with it? What doubts and questions and curiosities come to your mind? How do we respond?

Over the last few years, we've all been looking forward to getting back to normal with the pandemic. But the resurrection is a game changer. Normal is forever changed for us. Easter's the story of God's ultimate triumph over the power of sin and death. The resurrection created forever a new way of being human and opened up the promise of a new life for those who believe. The cross and empty tomb remind us that life prevails.

No matter how terrible things are, there is always hope. You see, Easter isn't just about the rising of Christ, it's about the rising of a whole new way of living for all those who believe. We can rise up above it all. We can stand out.

Julia Esquivel was a Guatemalan poet, pastor, and peace activist who lived in exile in Mexico during the horrendous genocides carried out among indigenous peoples in her homeland with more than 200,000 lives killed. Esquivel's most noted poem is entitled "Threatened by Resurrection." In it she points to the possibilities and power of a new life lived after the world we thought we knew is changed forever by the transforming power of Christ's gift of resurrection life. Esquivel declares in her poem:

*Accompany us then on this vigil
And you will know what it is to dream!
You will then know how marvelous it is
To live threatened with resurrection!
To dream awake,
To watch asleep,
To live while dying,
And to already know oneself resurrected!*

Resurrection life is not about living a moral life. Resurrection life is about receiving a gift that changes all life—the gift of life through death, the gift of grace greater than any evil.

You see, once you've walked up to that empty and open tomb, you can't go back to your life the way it was. You can't go back to the world the way it was. We're impelled to walk in Christ's footsteps. To work. To risk. To challenge. We die to ourselves and take up our cross, knowing we serve the God of the open and empty tomb. We serve the God who rolls away the stone. Our normal lives are threatened by the resurrection.

The empty tomb found on Easter morning was not empty. It was full of new life, of resurrection life. On Easter we encounter a life that threatens all of our old presumptions and all of our old predictions for our previous life.

On Easter morning, we're offered the "threat" of becoming new people, a resurrection people, who live into the ongoing, eternal presence of Christ's saving, redemptive love for all of creation.

So, Immanuel, let your life be "*threatened by resurrection*" this morning. Go into the world and be a "threat" to others, threatening the whole world to come to live, to come to love.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *The Resurrection of Christ*, Giovanni di Marco, 15th century

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