

## **“The Easter Mystery”**

**Luke 24:1-12**

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Frankfort, Kentucky

March 27, 2016

This morning our attention is drawn to Luke’s account of the resurrection of Jesus. There are a few features of this story I would like to point out to you before we examine it in detail.

Much attention is given to the empty tomb in Luke’s version of the resurrection. As a matter of fact, Jesus never makes an appearance. The empty tomb is the only prop on stage, and it is always front and center.

The women play a prominent role in all four gospels, but this is especially true in Luke. They are the main characters throughout the entire story. Even the heavenly messengers who speak to them assume they have been taught the same things Jesus taught the twelve disciples.

Luke’s version of the resurrection is shrouded in mystery, like a puzzle with missing pieces. After reading it, you are left with more questions than answers, which should take you deeper into the scriptures as you ponder the mysteries of life and faith.

Listen as I share Luke’s perspective of the resurrection of Jesus.

Several women rose early on Sunday morning to go to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Their mission was a simple but sad one. They were going to finish what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus began on Friday afternoon.

These were the two men who removed Jesus’ body from the cross and buried him. It was three o’clock in the afternoon, which meant they had to hurry. No work could be done on

the Sabbath, sundown Friday through sundown Saturday, and by that time the beginning of Sabbath was just three hours away.

This meant there was no time for the women to be a part of the burial process. Anointing Jesus' body with their spices and ointments would have to wait until Sunday morning.

Even before the first rays of light broke over the horizon, the women left for the tomb. It appears their broken hearts and restless spirits compelled them to leave while it was still dark. They had waited long enough.

Up to this point, the women who set out for the tomb had all the pieces of this puzzle they needed, or so they thought. Little did they know what awaited them.

When they arrived at the tomb, they did not find things as expected. The stone at the entrance had been rolled away, which alarmed and confused them.

Things only got worse when they entered the tomb. To their dismay, the body of Jesus was not there.

Luke says they did not know what to make of this. Who would? No one would have been prepared for what they found.

In the midst of their confusion, two men appeared and broke the silence. Their words did not clear up all their confusion, but they planted seeds of hope in their broken hearts.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here; he has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” (Luke 24:5b-7b)

Quickly, the women returned to Jerusalem and told the eleven remaining disciples what they had witnessed. As you would expect, their good news was met with skepticism and curiosity.

To no one's surprise, Peter, the impulsive leader of the disciples, was the first to run to the tomb. Luke reports he discovered everything to be as the women reported.

Their testimony had been validated, but this only led to a whole new set of questions. Why would the linen cloth still be lying where Jesus had been buried? Where was the body of Jesus? Had his body been stolen, and if so, by whom and why?

We are told Peter returned home trying to make sense of everything he saw and heard. About all he knew at this point was this puzzle had a lot of missing pieces, causing him to ponder and probe the mysteries of life and faith.

**When you read Luke's account of the resurrection, which is dramatically different from Matthew and John's versions that end in joy and jubilation, what stands out above everything else?** I believe it is what all the main characters had in common that morning. What was that?

**They did not expect that tomb to be empty.** No one, including the women who were vital to Jesus' ministry, the disciples or anyone else who saw Jesus die a horrible death on that cross believed his body would be missing on Sunday morning when they went to the tomb.

As far as they were concerned, Jesus' crucifixion was fatal and final. His life, as good as it was, ended and no more chapters would be written to his remarkable story.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead," the angels asked the women who stood in stunned silence at the sight of that empty tomb. The question itself made no sense to them. They weren't looking for the living among the dead. Like all people who visit a cemetery, they were looking for the dead among the dead.

**No one expected that tomb to be empty except Jesus.**

Listen to what else the angels said to the women that morning. "Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "

**Why was Jesus so confident that tomb would not hold him forever?** Jesus knew God would have the final word in his life, not Pilate, not Herod, not the High Priest, not Judas, not even the Roman soldiers who carried out the order to crucify him. None of these authority

figures would be able to keep God from doing what God does best, healing wounds and restoring life to those broken to bits by the harshness of life's steepest challenges and toughest struggles.

I believe Luke's initial resurrection story was written to contrast Jesus' confidence and faith in God to the women and disciples' feelings of despair and hopelessness.

Jesus believed in a God who could make all things new and was always working behind the scene to bring good out of bad and life out of death.

Jesus believed in the "always more of God," as theologian and Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann often reminds his readers.

Jesus knew God would provide more pieces to this puzzle that would make for a beautiful, uplifting, inspiring and hopeful picture.

There is one more thing Jesus knew. The same God who reached inside a sealed and guarded tomb to give him new life had and would do the same for all his children, and this includes you and me.

**Is this the hopeful message you need to hear today?** Do you identify with the women and disciples whose hopes were shattered and dreams vanished when they witnessed the crucifixion and burial of Jesus? Have you recently visited the cemetery of broken dreams?

If so, let Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus give you hope. Place your faith and future in the hands of the God who makes all things new because there is no situation you are going through or challenge you are facing that God cannot embrace and make better. If God can give life back to his beaten and battered Son, God can heal you and help you chart a new course.

By God's grace and with God's help, there is always more. There are no dead ends on the road of faith because Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone.

My favorite part of this story is the very first word. This chapter begins with a conjunction. After describing the wretched details of the crucifixion and the burial of Jesus on

Friday, Luke immediately turns our attention to Sunday morning, “But, on the first day of the week...”

Luke was eager to tell his readers Jesus’ death was not the end of the story. There was more, much more to be written because God had been working behind the scene all weekend to bring good out of bad, joy out of sorrow and life out of death.

“But, on the first day of the week...”

This morning, will you put your faith and future in the hands of God and let God bring good out of bad, joy out of sorrow and life out of death?

Will you look to God for wisdom, understanding, guidance, forgiveness, strength, courage and hope?

Will you let God help you dream new dreams and write more chapters to your story of redemption in the pursuit of a new and better life for you and everyone around you?

Will you draw close to God and rely upon the Lord to help you travel down unfamiliar roads?

With all my heart, I pray you will.