

**No Idle Tale
Luke 24:1-12
Easter Sunday**

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The gospel reading for this Easter Morning is Luke, chapter 24, verse 1 through 12. Similar to all the other gospel accounts of that morning, some women go to the tomb of Jesus, and nothing is as they expected. Easter and the events of that morning are at the very heart of the Church, and central to everything that we believe as Christians. It is why we gather every Sunday, on the first day of the week, and worship the one and only risen Lord; the one who came to save us all.

Jesus was crucified the day before the sabbath. As his body was placed in the tomb, a group of women were watching. At the end of chapter 23, Luke tells us, "Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment."

Listen now to Luke's version of the events of that most special morning:

^{24:1} But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Sermon

A group of women, who according to Luke, had followed Jesus from Galilee, have made the necessary preparations to anoint and honor the body of Jesus, per Jewish tradition. An important and nearly sacramental task. Every congregation has these people, often women, who spring into action when something happens. The ones who make the calls, gather the materials, and coordinate the food and servers to provide for the family of someone who has died.

The women's preparations are interrupted by the Sabbath, a required day of rest, but with everything ready, at dawn, as soon as it is safe to travel to the tomb where Jesus was laid, the women set out to complete their important work. Their arrival at the tomb is punctuated by what they find, and what they do not find.

"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 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."

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Obviously, the women came to the tomb looking for the dead. They came looking for the dead body of Jesus. They brought spices they had prepared to anoint the dead body of their teacher. What could these two men mean by such a question? But before they could wonder the two men, in dazzling clothes, explained, "He is not here, but has risen." And the two men continue: "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 women who had been with Jesus since Galilee had heard his teaching, had seen the wonders he had done, and had heard him tell them what to expect, what would happen, when they got to Jerusalem. And over the last few days, events had played out in just that way. Jesus was betrayed and crucified before their eyes, and now on the third day, the first day of the week, even though they went to the tomb expecting the dead body of their teacher, they were greeted with a phrase that is the culmination of the everything that Jesus had done and said. The simple statement that sums up the gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ: "He is not here, he is risen."

Luke continues his story: "Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest."

And when they told the disciples what they had seen, what they had heard, the *New Revised Standard Version* says that they thought the story was an idle tale. The Greek words means nonsense, or idle chatter; we might say idle gossip. Nothing to be taken seriously or believed, so the men did not believe what the women had told them.

But for some reason, Peter ran to the tomb and looking inside saw the "linen cloths by themselves; then went home, amazed at what had happened."

And that is where our Easter reading ends. It seems a little anti-climactic to me. The most amazing thing since creation has taken place, and it seems that only a few people know it, and everyone else can't believe what they have heard. And Peter, the otherwise quick to jump to conclusions and open his mouth, the first to proclaim Jesus the Messiah, and first to blurt out what he was thinking, goes "home, amazed at what had happened."

If you read on, in Luke chapter 24, you will hear how Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road, spoke with them, and sat down to eat with the. And you will hear that Jesus appeared to the disciples, showed them his hands and feet, and opened their minds to scripture, before he blessed them and was carried up into heaven. But, here on Easter morning we only hear about the experience of the women, the unbelief of the men, and Peter going home.

What do we do with this "idle tale" of the women who went out to the tomb at dawn?

The hard facts would be easy enough for us to verify. If we, like Peter, venture to the tomb we would find that the body of Jesus is indeed not there. But of course, we can't actually do that. But let's for moment assume we could. The physical evidence is compelling. The stone has been moved away from the opening and only linen cloths remain. This part of the women's story is easily verified. The empty tomb is not the wonder of this day. Easter Sunday, what I said is central to our faith, and the faith of Christians for centuries, is not based on the empty tomb. Our faith as Christians, is based on the words the two men said to the women that morning, and what they proclaim to us today. That simple phrase that is the good news of Jesus Christ: "He is not here, but has risen."

The men also encourage us to remember what Jesus told us when he was in Galilee. Remember what we hear in the gospels and the testimony of the rest of the New Testament. That Jesus is the Son of God who came proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom. Remember when Jesus told us, "that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified." But the message did

not stop there. Jesus went on to tell us the truth behind the gospel, that "on the third day [he would] rise again."

Each of us has a decision to make.

Will we leave not believing the "idle tale" we have heard? We could, like the disciples, remain unconvinced by the witness of the women. We could be like the ones who followed Jesus, heard his teaching, witnessed the wonders he performed, and didn't understand the truth of the gospel witness as presented to us.

Or we could be like Peter, and seeing for ourselves, go home amazed by everything we have seen and heard.

Or we could be like, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who were with them, and go from here filled with the joy of the Easter proclamation, and the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We could leave here proclaiming to the world:

"He is not here, but has risen!"

Let us pray:

Holy God, open our ears to the message proclaimed this morning. Open our minds to the truth of scripture, and open our hearts to the knowledge that you have raised your Son from the dead, to show us the truth of life in your kingdom. And give us the certainty to go from here proclaiming that good news to the world: "He is not here, but has risen."

Amen.