

SERMON FOR EASTER SUNDAY 2019

TEXT: LUKE 24:1-12

THEME: THE WONDERFUL EASTER SURPRISE

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

In the name of Jesus:

It has been said that Martin Luther always began his Easter sermon with a joke. It is a familiar story in church circles, so please bear with me if you have heard this one before.

A pastor was telling the Easter story to some small children in Sunday School. After telling the Easter story, one small boy asked the pastor: "What did Jesus say when He came out of the tomb?" And with that, a little girl raised her hand and said: "I know what Jesus said." The

pastor was intrigued, so he asked the girl what Jesus said, and with that, she stood up and said: "Surprise!"

I don't know if that is a true story or not, but I do know that the story of Easter is not only true, but the events of the Easter story came as a great surprise to the disciples and those who followed Jesus. No one, and I mean no one, expected Jesus to rise from the grave. How do I know that? Just listen to what Luke records: "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared." These women, in fact, as we shall see, everyone involved in the Easter story were caught completely off guard. They were, in a word, surprised. Never in a million years did they expect Jesus to rise from the grave. If they expected a resurrection, then why did the women go to the tomb with spices? They brought the spices that they had prepared because they fully expected to find the body of Jesus and they were going to prepare His body for a proper burial. But note what comes next, what they found, and what they didn't find. Luke writes: ²And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." Now note their reaction to this discovery, or lack of a discovery, they weren't overjoyed by this for the Bible says that they were perplexed about this. They

were completely caught off guard and surprised, wondering where the body of Jesus was, and what in the world was happening. In their perplexity, they beheld two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground. They were shaking in their boots and the angels cut to the chase by asking them: ““Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

We see throughout the Gospel of Luke that this was a prevailing and constant theme of Jesus’ teaching, that it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to go to Jerusalem, to be handed over to sinners, to be mocked, beaten, whipped, and accused of crimes and for crimes He never committed, to be crucified, but that ultimately, Jesus would rise on the third day. And here it was the Third Day, and everyone was surprised at what was taking place. Jesus’ first words to the women might as well of been: “Surprise! Remember what I had been saying all these many months?”

Remember, it is a common theme running through this Easter story. Why are you so surprised, don’t you remember what Jesus said,

what He was teaching, what He was preaching? The angels kept telling Jesus' followers; don't you remember what Jesus said? The people who went to the tomb expected a dead body, but got something totally different. They expected a closed tomb but now it was open. They expected death, but God surprised them with New Life.

The women shared this Surprising News as they went to proclaim to the others, the eleven apostles and the approximately 120 followers of Jesus. And note their reaction to this Surprising News! They told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. That is to say, they disbelieved. They kept on not believing this Surprising news of the resurrection. Luke doesn't paint a rosy picture of the first followers of Jesus, does he? He shows them with all of their doubts, their lack of faith, and their outright refusal to believe. It isn't a pretty picture, but then again, we are no better.

So many times in our lives we treat the reality of the resurrection of Jesus as an idle tale, and we live our lives, not in faith, but in utter disbelief. We show our outright refusal to believe in the power and the promise of the resurrection when we push God off to the side and make Him one of many priorities in our lives, giving Him lip service in our

lives. In our failure and refusal to hear God's word, to apply it to our lives, in our lack of love for those around us, in our refusal to forgive our enemies and those who have hurt us, in our failing to trust God and His promises, trying to take matters into our own hands, and in our patterns of life when we do not live the new life God calls us live by the power He gives us in Jesus.

The Surprise of Easter is that God didn't wait on the disciples and God doesn't wait on us. God does the totally unexpected, and what He does in Jesus He does not because we deserve it (we don't) but He does this because He loves us in Jesus.

The Bible says that He, Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us. God let happen to Jesus the very worst that Satan could do to Him. The horrible and cruel crucifixion was beyond what any normal human being could bear. God allowed His Son to be tormented physically, spiritually, and emotionally by the Devil in the worst way possible. Jesus took your place and mine, becoming the object of God's wrath over sin, Satan and death. It is as if Jesus said to His Father, do Your worst, bring it, treat Me like a worm and not a man, because at the end there would be a Wonderful Surprise. For the Wonderful Easter Surprise is that God did the unexpected at Easter. No one was expecting it, but

look at what God has done. He has given sinners more than what they could have expected from a just and loving God.

For the Good News of Easter is that God has reversed things, and set things upside down. God undid death. He reversed death. Death is not the end. The angel proclaimed what God has done in Jesus, for Christ has risen from the grave. Jesus is the 1st Person to rise from the dead forever. He is the 1st Person to experience resurrection life. Jesus is called the Living One for He lives and reigns forever. He is the first - fruits of them who have died, for all who are baptized into Christ and believe in Jesus now have resurrection life! Jesus doesn't stick a band - aid on our hurts, He completely does a new thing, it is marvelous in God's eyes, and it is much to our surprise.

This past week we all witnessed the horror of a devastating fire the nearly destroyed the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris France. Pictures inside the church after the fire show a remarkable sight. While the fire raged and did its damage, pictures show that the altar and cross in the nave remain untouched by the fire. Those who saw this sight wrote: the central part of the historic Gothic cathedral still intact. Rows of wooden pews and much of the nave appears to have been saved, only a small part of the vault collapsed. Interior seems relatively untouched.

And this came as a wonderful surprise to everyone, who predicted that the structure would be a total loss.

God has many more surprises in store, especially for you and all who are in Christ. We all live lives in a world that is dying, burning to the ground as we speak. Satan rages with all of his might. In the midst of our lives we see the ravages of sin, sickness, disease, disappointment, unbelief, disbelief, and death. But just as God surprised the disciples on that first Easter by raising Christ from the dead, so too God has a wonderful surprise in store for all who believe in Jesus. For God is in Christ making all things new. Just as Christ has risen from the grave, so too we will rise. Daily by the power of Christ in our Baptism God is making us into His new creation. He gives us power to live lives of love and hope and peace. Loving God first and foremost, and showing love to others. And on the Last Day Christ will rise up all who are in Christ to live with Him forever. Just like Adam and Eve before the Fall, we will be without sin and live forever in the presence of God.

God has wonderful surprises in store for you! He loves you with an everlasting love. He freely forgives you all your sins. He promises to work all things out to your good and His glory. And then will come an even more glorious surprise!

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory! O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Amen