

***Luke 24:1-11** Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. <sup>3</sup> Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. <sup>5</sup> Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> "saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' "<sup>8</sup> And they remembered His words. <sup>9</sup> Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.*

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Several years ago, books entitled "Where's Waldo?" were all the rage. The whole point was for children and adults alike to locate a cartoon character named Waldo amidst a larger picture containing all sort of images. The real difficulty in doing so was that there was no real reason or clue as to where Waldo might be. He just appeared wherever.

Our Gospel text for today starts this way, "Very early in the morning, the women went to the tomb." Yes, the women went looking for Jesus on Easter morning. But there was one big problem. To be quite simple about it, they had gone to the wrong place to find Jesus. When they arrived, our text says that they were perplexed by the fact that Jesus was not in the tomb where He had been placed. As they stood there at the tomb wondering what had happened to their Lord, two men in shining garments appeared to them with a truly pressing question that we perhaps often soften too much. They said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" In other words, "Why are you here? You came to the wrong place." No, it wasn't that the women had gone to the wrong tomb; they just shouldn't have looked for Jesus in a tomb at all. Indeed the question that those angels asked the women was more than just a proclamation of Jesus' resurrection but also a reminder to those women that they should have known that He would not be there. In other words, they should not have been nearly that thrown by the sight of an empty tomb. Jesus had explained in parables and in plain speech to them that the Son of Man would be handed over to sinful men, would be crucified, but on the third day would rise again. Those women on that first Easter should have well known that Jesus would not be lying dead in the

grave, but rather should have expected Him to be alive. They came with spices to embalm a dead man when they should have come with lilies to celebrate His resurrection.

And just so you don't think I am just picking on the women, even after the disciples were reminded of Jesus' words and told of the women's angelic encounter, Luke tells us they thought that the women were just telling idle tales, rather than the truth. Peter ran to the tomb, and left there just as bewildered as the women.

The problem with those women and the disciples is that they trusted in common sense rather than meditating upon Jesus words. They figured that just like anyone, Jesus would still be in his tomb after three days. People placed in graves are not known to go anywhere. But by trusting common sense, they had ignored all of the times when Jesus had told them that He would not be found dead on the third day, but alive.

Perhaps this is why Jesus appeared to so many people. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, the list of people that beheld the risen Lord was not a small list. Peter saw Him. The twelve saw Him as they gathered to discuss the possibility of the accounts of His resurrection. Over five hundred men at once saw Him. James saw Him. And who can forget when Thomas not only saw but touched Jesus' wounds. All of these people had the advantage of seeing, hearing, and touching our resurrected Lord. But they truly shouldn't have needed it. They should have believed from the words He had spoken before His death that He would be alive!

To be sure, Jesus words were hard to believe. The idea of someone raising himself from the dead wasn't a very reasonable assertion. I suppose most of us would have gathered up spices to go with the women that day also. It would have made sense. But today we are not called to make sense, but are called to confess that Jesus is alive even though He was dead.

Unlike those followers of the first century, we do not have the advantage of having Jesus appear to us in full bodily form to convince us of the truth. That is why Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We are left to believe based on one thing, the testimony of the word of God. In our Epistle lesson for the day Paul relates to the Corinthians what He called the "things of first importance": that Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose. And today through those same words given by the Spirit, God calls us to believe these things of first importance. As we read Paul's letter, it is as if Jesus himself instructs us about His death and resurrection just like He had done His disciples before His passion. We hear today again His

Word and by God's Holy Spirit believe it. The faith that He gives us is the reason why we gather today on this most holy day to proclaim that our Lord is not dead, but lives. We are not left to gather at His tomb and wonder what might have happened but rather to confess what did happen.

And what did happen? Jesus rose. Sins were forgiven. Death was destroyed. Satan was defeated. Newness of life through baptism was made possible. And eternal life in heaven was assured for you and for me.

We celebrate on Easter that Jesus has power over Satan, over sin, and over the grave. And we rejoice that thanks be to Jesus' grace and mercy, so do we. We have been given power over Satan and sin in our baptism when we received the Holy Spirit of power. And on the last day the power over death that Jesus demonstrated at His tomb Easter morning will be demonstrated over each of our tombs as well. We will rise and live forever with our living Lord. And how do we know all of this is true? Because Jesus' word is more than trustworthy. He said that He would die and three days later be alive, and indeed He was alive just as He had promised. So also, all of His promises are as sure as that tomb was empty.

We as Christians are people who hear Jesus speak and believe. We do not seek to figure out how His word can be true, but rather believe it because it is His word. This is not true only of where we look for Jesus on Easter morning. It is true of all of Jesus' words. When Jesus says that wherever two or more of his children are gathered, He is there, we don't search around the corner at church for him. But rather, we believe it to be true and in so doing long to gather here regularly with Him and with our fellow Christians. When He says that people are brought to faith as water is combined with God's word in Holy Baptism, we don't seek to explain it or to question it, but rather believe it. And believing, we bring our children and those adults who come to faith to this font to receive grace from His hand. And when He says that today we receive His body and His blood in His Supper, we don't send the elements off to a lab for confirmation of His presence, but rather we receive it this day with great joy.

Christian friends, we need not spend large amounts of time trying to find Jesus. For we find Jesus where He says that He is. If we listen to His words, we know where to find Him. We find our living Lord active in His church, in His word, and in His sacraments just where He has promised to be.

We rejoice this Easter day that finding Jesus is much easier than finding Waldo, for He tells us where to look. On this Easter morning we are glad to confess that if you want to find Jesus, you had better not go to His tomb. For, He will not be there. Only dead people live in tombs, and Jesus is alive. So today we look not in the tomb for our Lord, but rejoice that He is living and active among us today through His word and in His Supper. Jesus is risen and He is here. It is more than proper that we return to singing our alleluias this day. He is risen, He is risen, indeed. Alleluia and Amen.