

Sermon Luke 24:1-12

Easter Sunday

April 20th, 2025

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

What are you doing here?

This is how I would paraphrase the first words the two men in dazzling white speak to the women who have come to the tomb to embalm Christ's body. What are you doing here? Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Don't you remember how he told you about all this back in Galilee, that he has to suffer and die and rise again on the third day?

Now we like to identify those dazzling figures as angels, for who else would look or appear like that? And the appearance of angels is typical for Luke, whose account of the Easter story we heard this morning; Luke talks a lot about angels, much more so than the other evangelists. But something is a little off about the angels on Easter morning. For usually, the angels appear with a reassuring message, be it when Gabriel comes to Mary to tell her that she would receive a child of the Holy Spirit, or the heavenly host appear to the shepherds in the field: 'Do not be afraid', 'Fear not!'

But here, in the Easter story, the angels don't waste any time with the 'Don't be afraid' business; in fact, they appear quite insensitive and rude. Just imagine, those poor women, grieving the death of their master and friend – they just want to render their last act of love and mercy. And then those angels appear, out of the blue, obviously terrifying the women, and cut right to the chase, 'What in the world are you doing here? You should know better than that!'

Should the women, should the disciples have known better than that? Indeed, Jesus told his followers several times that he has to suffer and die and rise again. Now it's one thing to hear something, it's another to let it sink in and believe it – and isn't the resurrection story just too fantastic, too mind blowing, too good to be true to be believed?

But it seems that the message of the men in dazzling white without any niceties and politeness has the desired effect on the women.

What are you doing here?

This is like a wake-up call for the women. They remember, the English translation says here. Now the original Greek word that we have here ‘mneo’, is a little stronger than that. ‘Mneo’ means to think back in order to move forward. In that sense, remembrance is not just looking back at something and being nostalgic about it and to long for the good old days; remembrance doesn’t mean to be stuck in the past, but to use what we experienced as we go into the future – to learn from experience as we go into the future. Another translation would be ‘living memory’ ‘evolving memory’. This kind of memory has consequences and leads to action that is future-oriented.

And so the women at the tomb don’t just respond as they remember, ‘O yeah, now that you say it – why, isn’t that nice?’ No, their remembering has consequences: the women go and tell – and again, the English translation here is a little blah, the Greek here says ‘they went and proclaimed it loudly’, they shout out like heralds in a marketplace, or like prophets, or like angels – so they shout it out to the disciples. Now they think it’s an idle tale and don’t get it until later, but once they do, once they remember, they get it, they are overjoyed, and they live this memory in word and deed – by following in the footsteps of Jesus, doing their best to share his love, mercy, and forgiveness as a foretaste of God’s kingdom yet to be fully established among us. By demonstrating what this new life Jesus promises is all about. And if they hadn’t done that, we wouldn’t be here today.

For us, the Easter story is not a surprise as it quite obviously was to the women and the disciples. We get it – we think – somewhat, at least. We know that somehow and mysteriously, Christ rose from the dead and promises us and all of creation new life – NEW life, not some past life riddled with nostalgia warmed over. Maybe some here today think that this is too good to be true, and maybe the resurrection story should be understood in a more symbolic or metaphysical way; that it’s a nice tale, but an idle tale, without consequences for our lives.

But here we are. And: we remember. We remember the story as we hear it each Easter morn, that’s why we are gathered here today, celebrating and singing and shouting at the top of our lungs. Alleluia, Christ is risen!

But how do we remember? What are you – what are we doing here?

Well, right here and now, we celebrate Easter and the new life that cannot be overcome by destruction, violence, and death. As we should. To spite all evil around us, we need to laugh the devil and death in the face with defiant hope and joy. We are reminded of this amazing story that seems too good to be true.

But it is one thing to be here this morning, to be reminded of the good news that Christ is risen, and to think, ‘Why, isn’t that nice?’, ‘Aren’t the flowers beautiful?’, and ‘Isn’t it wonderful to have so many people here?’

It is another thing to remember in the sense that we look back and move forward, to not be stuck in the past or pining for the good old days, but, grounded in the past, to explore where God leads us now, where new life is waiting now to spring forth – new life we are called to foster. To take what we’ve learned and experienced and re-member it in different ways. The Easter story reminds us to live our faith in the resurrection of Christ and the new life promised to all creation in fresh, creative, and courageous ways.

We are here this morning to remember that we are Christ’s church, a living, breathing, loving, forgiving, healing, life-giving and life-fostering church. That’s what you and I are doing here this morning as we remember – Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia, amen!