

EASTER 2025:

¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. Mark 16: 1-8.

We have been in a series that I have called the passion. Which is another word for his suffering, specifically the horrors surrounding his last week on earth which culminated in his death by crucifixion. We take up this story with Mark's gospel. When these women arrived at the burial tomb of Jesus, they saw he was not in his grave. He was not in the burial tomb. These women were left trembling and bewildered. They were completely disorientated. Totally confused. Scared to death.

In Matthew's account, they were afraid yet filled with joy. ⁸**So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Matthew 28:8.** All sorts of conflicting emotions were taking place because of what they had found. They found a risen Messiah. All this was too much for them. ¹²**Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. Luke 24: 12.** Even Peter knew Jesus was no longer in his tomb, but he was left wondering about what had happened.

At the beginning of God's great work, humans frequently recoiled in fear. The command, "do not be afraid" reverberates throughout Scripture. We must hear these words again and again because God is always doing what is unexpected and often leading people where they do not want to go, beginning with the time that God established a covenant with Abraham. ¹**After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1.** Further, he tells Jacob not to be afraid to go down to Egypt as he has grand plans for Abraham's descendants. ³**"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. Genesis 46:3.**

So, the resurrection story begins with confusion. Those who went to find the tomb empty were totally perplexed, muddled and completely puzzled. Christ has risen! Some people had heard the rumor. Others suspected foul play. The religious leaders were so worried that they took action to contain this story as it would ruin their plans and threaten their status. So, they fabricated a false story to convince everyone that the resurrection was simply not true.

¹¹**While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²When the chief priests had met with**

the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Matthew 28: 11-15.

So, there was a conspiracy to deny the truth of the resurrection. The enemies of Jesus race to put an end to the stories that were circulating about an empty tomb and resurrection. This was predicated by an earlier request, ⁶² **The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.** ⁶³ "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." Matthew 27: 62-64.

Unfortunately, this is nothing more than a concocted story. It is highly unlikely that all the guards would have fallen asleep as the penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was death. ¹⁸ **In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter.** ¹⁹ **After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.** Acts 12: 18-19.

Straight after Luke's account of the resurrection he moves into this story. It is only found in Luke's Gospel. I like to call it, The revelation at Emmaus. ¹³ **Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.** ¹⁴ **They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.** ¹⁵ **As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;** ¹⁶ **but they were kept from recognizing him.** Luke 24:13-16.

Here are two weary travellers talking about everything that had happened in Jerusalem. This has been a traumatic weekend for them both. They are so absorbed in an emotional discussion that they hardly notice a fellow traveler walking along near them. When they do see him, they do not recognise him. For the gospel writer Luke, he is pointing out a crucial difference between sight and understanding. Between seeing Jesus and grasping his real identity.

¹⁷ **He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.** Here Jesus asks them about their conversation. How much Jesus has noticed. Yet, by comparison these two have noticed nothing. One of them asks a question in verse eighteen. ¹⁸ **"Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"** Jesus' response is, "What things?". His response is sympathetic, given their grief and their response is restrained and enthusiastic.

¹⁹ **"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.** ²⁰ **The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;** ²¹ **but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.** ²² **In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning** ²³ **but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who**

said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Luke 24: 13-35.

In this story the travellers did not recognise Jesus when he was teaching them the Scriptures. However, in the act of hospitality, the breaking of bread they suddenly know who he is. This reminds us of the power of hospitality. I like how David Jeffrey in his Theological Commentary on Luke puts it, **"For them the bread of life who had sprung from the earth had become at once their guest and host"**.

Furthermore, it is no accident that Jesus is revealed as he sits having table fellowship with his two followers. The table was the place for fellowship in the ancient world. The table was a place where Jesus was heard and where his presence came across most intimately. This suggests that Jesus reveals himself amid the basic most moments of life. He is at home during our everyday activity.

This is one of the most amazing ways that Christ's presence comes amongst his faithful followers. He has been there all along from the very beginning in the teaching of the Scriptures, a living presence in the word. Jeffrey goes on to say, **"A mark of faithful discipleship has always been in some measure the desire to share in the Emmaus experience, to have conversation with Jesus and to have him, by his spirit, open the Scriptures in such a way as to enable our fuller recognition of who he is"**.

The two disciples were not the only ones to whom Jesus appeared. The resurrection is witnessed by many different believers. First Corinthians gives us a short list of Jesus' appearances. ⁵ **and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.** ⁶ **After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.** ⁷ **Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,** ⁸ **and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.** 1

Corinthians 15: 5-8. The multiple reports in this passage indicate how widespread the testimony had become.

If you have not experienced this new life made possible by Jesus, you can do that this morning. Christians have great power when we believe. When we rebuke spirits that are attacking us or fellow Christians. The power to stand firm when the storm rages.

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1: 19-23.

Jesus also sits at the right hand of God. This is not some kind of abstract idea but a central reality of the Christian faith. He now possesses authority over all those forces that stand opposed to us and our faith. Such authority stands behind his ability to give us new birth. **¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2: 1-10.**

Lewis Smedes said this, **"It may be a very bad thing that I needed God to die for me but isn't it a wonderful thing that God thinks I'm worth dying for".** Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets **Acts 3:21.** While some of the promises of God are yet to be fulfilled. When the Lord returns, he will finish what he has started. Early Christians would greet each other at Easter by saying, "He is risen". "He is risen Indeed". It has changed everything. **⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13: 8.**