

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Easter, April 21, 2019

One Journey Can Change Your Life: Go See for Yourself!

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.

I can imagine last Monday morning there were conversations like this in a few households.

Mom steps into son's room. "Let's go! Get up. There are five inches of snow so we need to leave early."

Son: No response. Five minutes pass.

Mom: "Come on. There are five inches of snow. We need to leave now!"

Son: "Aw, mom. I don't want to get up yet. There can't be that much snow!"

Frustrated Mom: "Go see for yourself!"

Go see for yourself. That's what I would have said to the disciples that first Easter morning. The women came from the tomb filled with excitement. Jesus' grave is empty. We saw angels. They told us, "He is not here; he has risen!"

And the disciples' response? "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." About a half dozen women all saying the same thing, but no one believed them! If you had been there, wouldn't you have finally got fed up and said, "Go see for yourself"?

That's my encouragement to you this Easter morning. "Go see for yourself!"

For the disciples, if it were really true that Jesus had risen, their lives would change dramatically. They had to be absolutely sure. That's true for you too. This is too important a question to say, "Sometime I'll check it out" or "I'll let someone else check it out for me." If this is true or not changes everything. Were the angel's words true, "He is not here; he has risen"? Today, I invite you to join me on a journey that no one can take for you. I can't make this journey for you. My certainty about Jesus' tomb won't help you. You have to go see for yourself. But I should warn you, if you go on this journey, it will change your life.

1. Go! Remember!

First, let's go and remember!

That's what the angels told the women. "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

On the outline, I jokingly suggest reading the New Testament fine print. What I mean is that when Jesus told his disciples about his coming death, he often also spoke to them about his resurrection. But it was almost like the resurrection references were the fine print that the disciples overlooked.

Page back through Luke with me.

- "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22).

This was right after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah. Jesus lays out the entire picture. Arrest. Death. Resurrection. Peter responded. "Never!" he told Jesus, "This shall never happen to you!" It seems Peter heard Arrest and Death, but missed Resurrection. He missed what I call "the fine print."

- Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." ³⁴ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. (Luke 18:31-33).

Jesus' references to the resurrection were the fine print that the disciples just couldn't see.

Go! Read the four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. See how often Jesus talked about his resurrection. Go and remember that this happened just like what Jesus said. Go and remember that the witnesses admit that this wasn't some cleverly invented story (2 Peter 1:16). They were just as shocked by Jesus' resurrections as the Jewish authorities.

But then go back farther. Go and remember that that the entire Old Testament talks about Jesus' resurrection. That's what Jesus did on Easter afternoon when he met the two men on the way to

the village of Emmaus. Beginning with the Five Books of Moses at the beginning of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27), he explained that the Christ had to die and rise again.

Now, if you are familiar with the Old Testament, you certainly have reason to challenge me on that claim that the whole Old Testament is about Jesus' resurrection. To be honest, there are only a few golden nuggets that clearly announce his resurrection. But there are traces of the resurrection all along the way.

The journey starts in the Garden of Eden. After the fall into sin, the LORD God promises an Offspring of the woman who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). But at this point in the journey, there isn't an answer to the question: How will the woman's child destroy Satan's power over us?

The journey continues into the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Each hear the promise from God that through their offspring all nations of the world will be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4). But again, we are left with the question, "How will all nations be blessed?"

The prophecies continue until about 1000 years before Christ when God begins to make things clear. This is what I call one of the Old Testament golden nuggets. Now comes some answers to the "how?"

The Holy Spirit inspired King David to write Psalm 16: "You will not let your Holy One see decay." David's body decayed. Peter in a sermon fifty days after Easter will say that you could still see David's tomb at that time. But the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David, was saying that David's greater Son would not see decay in the grave. His body would not stay in the grave.

Three hundred years later, the prophet Isaiah in his 53rd chapter talks about someone who will be a "sin offering." You know what a sin offering is? (See Leviticus 4.) It is a male goat. You bring it to the temple. You lay your hands on its head, and you confess your sins on to that goat. The big ones and the little ones. Whether you lied, or cheated, or gossiped, or held a grudge, or even hurt someone's feelings unintentionally. And then you would slit that animal's throat and it would bleed out. A sin offering died. It was a powerful reminder that the wages of sin is death. But then listen to how the prophecy continues:

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin...
After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:10,11).

The one who dies as a sin offering lives again. The "offspring of the woman" prophecy, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prophecies, they all start to become clear. They were promising that a Child born to their family would be able to be the sin offering for the world and then rise again to assure us that the payment for sins is complete.

Psalm 16, Isaiah 53 and a few others are the golden nuggets of the Old Testament that clearly announce the resurrection. But the entire rest of the Old Testament records how God protected and corrected the descendants of Adam and Abraham and Isaac and David so that the family line continued down to Jesus so that he could rise victorious on Easter morning.

I'm not asking you to take my word for it. Here again, you have to go see for yourself. My conviction isn't going to help you.

But I am inviting you to go on this journey of remembrance with me. If you don't have a Bible, pick one up at the Welcome Center as our gift to you. And take along the Bible reading plan that I use. I've put my email address and phone number on it. If you read something you don't understand, you can email or call me. Let's go on this journey together.

2. Go! Examine the Witnesses

But all this talk about reading the Bible is based on a huge assumption, that this book is reliable.

The only way we will know for certain is if we examine the witnesses. That's what the writer of our lesson for today did.

Luke was not an eyewitness, just like you and I aren't eyewitnesses. What he did is carefully examine the witnesses. This is how he starts his gospel:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word. ³With this in mind, since I myself have **carefully investigated everything from the beginning**, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

I'll be honest, I'm always cross-examining the witnesses. Did this really happen? In fact, there is one of those little things here in our lesson that tells me this is a reliable source.

Why does Luke mention Joanna as a witness to the resurrection? He mentions Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James. Those women are mentioned by other gospel writers. And there are other women present that he does not name. But why does he mention Joanna?

Who is Joanna? She is mentioned only one other time in the Bible, again by Luke, that she was one of women who traveled with Jesus and who helped to support the disciples out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).

Why did Luke mention Joanna? I can't be sure, but it would seem likely it is because Luke knew Joanna personally. He tells us he examined the witnesses. Luke was in the Jerusalem area while Paul was imprisoned in the early 60's AD. Many of these people would still have been alive. Joanna was almost certainly one of witnesses he cross-examined as he "carefully investigated everything from the beginning."

Go! Examine the witnesses. That's what Paul did in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. He lists people, even mentioning that Jesus appeared to 500 people at once. Some of them have died, but most of them are still living. Why did Paul mention that? Wasn't he saying, "Go ask them yourself!"

But wait a minute. You are at a disadvantage. Now all those eyewitnesses are dead. You can't go and ask them yourself. But then think of yourself as a cold-case investigator. You sift through the written testimony. There are lots of witnesses. As you read the Bible, think in terms of cross-examining the witnesses. Is Matthew a trustworthy witness? Mark? Luke? John? Peter? Paul? What did they have to gain by lying about Jesus' resurrection? How were they putting their lives at stake by saying that Jesus was alive? How does that impact your thinking about them? Do they agree? Is there collusion? Are they are just following the same made-up story?

These are the questions that I ponder when I read the New Testament. I would invite you to go along with me on this journey and see if the eyewitnesses are reliable.

3. Go! But Be Warned!

But I have to warn you if you go with me on this journey, it will change you. If you are convinced that the tomb is empty or if Jesus is still dead, then you can't be a "fence sitter." You have got to be involved.

If you go on this journey to the tomb, you may discover that the tomb wasn't empty. You may be convinced that Jesus didn't rise from the dead. If that is the case, you can't ignore Christianity. Then it is a force of evil. You need to accuse parents of child-abuse for subjecting their children to a lie. Then you should be angry about one of the greatest hoaxes in history.

But if you are on this journey to the tomb, and you discover that the tomb is empty, then your life isn't yours anymore. Then you have powerful knowledge that can change every person you know. Then you need to be like those "crazy women" who came back from the tomb and insisted that the disciples go and see for themselves.

This is the journey that we are starting today, a journey to Jesus' tomb. I do guarantee that it is a journey that will change your life.

Will you join us on this journey? I know I could use the company. Next week we are going to assault the fortress of doubt. You see, doubt is like a powerful magnet, constantly drawing me in. I think of it like Mount Doom in the Lord of the Rings. Mount Doom was constantly drawing Frodo to itself and to death. He needed help to destroy the power of the Ring. So do I! I need to destroy the power of doubt! Would you join me on this journey?

In the Lord of the Rings, the companions on the journey were called the Fellowship of the Ring. Maybe we could call ourselves the Fellowship of the Empty Tomb. Let's go on this journey together, not to destroy a ring, but to destroy doubt, and guilt and fear and even death.

The Fellowship of the Empty Tomb! What are we waiting for? Let's go!

Prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke
414-422-0320 ext 122
ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org

My Next Steps on a Life-Changing Journey

- **Fill your backpack:** If you don't have a Bible of your own, stop by the Welcome Center to receive one as our gift. Pick up the Bible reading plan and join Pastor Pete in a "Fellowship of the Empty Tomb."
- **Enjoy an Old Testament Golden Nugget:** Read over and over Psalm 16:9-11 to memorize this promise about Jesus' resurrection that then becomes a promise about your own resurrection.
- **Join a "Fellowship of the Empty Tomb":** Mark on the Connection Card interest in the next *Following the Promise* Bible introduction study.

GroupWork

1. Share a highlight from your celebration of Jesus' resurrection this year.
2. "Go, see for yourself!" As you feel comfortable, share the time in your life when you thought, "I have to prove it to myself that Jesus really did rise from the dead." Was it as a child? A teen? A young adult? A time of challenge in your life?
3. The angel said to the women, "Remember how he told you" (Luke 24:6). What do the following passages have in common?
 - Mark 9:9-10
 - Mark 9:30-32
 - Mark 10:32-34
4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. List the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. What other eyewitnesses can you add to that list from the rest of the Bible?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23. What are some of God's promises to you that are made certain by Jesus' resurrection?
6. Break up into groups of three or four for prayer: Share a fear or concern that you have for yourself or someone else. Then the person next to you is to pray for you to the Risen Savior to use the power he used to raise himself from the dead to help you.