

Resurrection of Our Lord (RCL/C): "Not Where We Expect Him!"  
Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12  
April 20, 2025  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

When's the last time you didn't find what you were looking for in the place you expected it to be, the place it **should** have been? You almost always leave your car keys in the same place, but you're running out the door late to an appointment, reach for them, and they're not there! Drat! You have an e-mail folder for all your medical records but when you open it to look for your most recent bloodwork, it's not there. Darn! Misplaced things are such a puzzlement. (Our Roman Catholic friends pray to St. Anthony as the patron saint of lost things. I have a mental list of all the things that are currently missing in my life and I call it my St. Anthony list.)

When something's missing, especially if it's really important, we become worried, not just puzzled, and we ask ourselves, "Have I **misplaced** it, actually **lost** it, or has it been **stolen**?" And if it's a person not a thing we can't find, we move quickly from puzzlement to worry to sheer panic. We dropped off a son or daughter at a particular entrance to the mall and agreed that pick-up would be at the same place as drop-off. We get the call or text that they're ready to come home, return to the designated spot, and see no one. And the child isn't answering the phone. Irritation gives way to worry which leads to parental panic. What happened to this kid?? Why didn't I follow through on installing the Find-a-Friend app on my phone so I could be tracking her whereabouts??

The ladies on Easter morning aren't having to use GPS to find Jesus' tomb. Thank heaven He wasn't buried in a trench grave, the fate of most 1<sup>st</sup> century criminals. His wealthy follower Joseph of Arimathea had donated his newly purchased tomb, a fresh niche in a rock wall, as Jesus' "final" resting place. The duo of Mary's, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, together with Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza (whom some of us know from *The Chosen*), and

some other women had tracked Joseph of Arimathea's whereabouts and activities after the crucifixion, and know exactly where the body of their dear Rabbi, Jesus, has been laid. It isn't something they are apt to forget.

They have a lot of things to worry about on their early dawn trip to the tomb that Sunday. What is going to be the fate of the male disciples? Will **they** be crucified too? In St. Mark's Gospel we read that the women were **very** concerned how they'd access the tomb once they got there, because an enormous stone had been rolled across the entrance to prevent jackals from desecrating the body, and to prevent Jesus' disciples from "stealing" it, a concern the religious leaders had planted in Pilate's head. One thing they aren't worried about is not being able to **find** what they are looking for. They know where it had been left, and it is an inanimate object, a dead body that can't relocate itself, so "no worries." Right??

*They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "**Why do you look for the living among the dead?**" (Luke 24:2-5)*

*The Message* version says:

***"Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?" Then they remembered Jesus' words.*** (Luke 24: 5b-8a)

Then I remembered I put the car keys in the pocket of the raincoat I wore yesterday, not on the hook where they belong. Then I remembered the bloodwork results I'm looking for came in the U.S. mail, not in e-mail. Then it all makes sense: because I **remember**.

It doesn't all make sense to the ladies, not by a longshot. But they are greatly relieved, if still a bit puzzled, and they are anxious to tell the guys. St. Matthew says they fled the tomb, but in "great joy," and they **ran** to tell the disciples (Matt. 28:8) -- who of course didn't believe them --

except, surprisingly, Peter, who went to check out the empty tomb and came back **amazed**, which is lot better than coming back plain confused. There's grace and budding faith in amazement!

One of the wildest things about the Easter Gospel, other than the resurrection itself ☺, is that the women take center stage. It's surprising because they're rarely mentioned in the Passion story of Matthew, Mark and Luke, except for maidservants in the high priest's courtyard fingering Peter as one of Jesus' disciples, and the description of women watching the crucifixion, removal of Jesus' body from the cross, and burial from a distance. But it's **most** surprising because the testimony of women as witnesses wasn't admissible in Jewish courts! Regardless, the first people entrusted with the good and glad news of the resurrection were women! "You go, girls!" The resurrection, after all, isn't anything for a human court to debate. It has already been affirmed, forever, by the High Court of Heaven.

Of course, most of the men didn't believe the women. The Greek word translated as the "*idle tale*" the men considered the women's story to be, is a medical term for "the babbling of a fevered and insane mind."<sup>1</sup> In other words, **ravings**.... Ron Weasley's description would be "barking mad." No wonder, then, that the risen Lord begins to show up in person, in stories we get to enjoy later in the Easter season: to a couple on the road to Emmaus, to frightened disciples locked in an upper room, to frustrated fishermen on a beach, to followers gathered on a mountaintop before His ascension. Seeing is believing, right? The women's word wasn't good enough. The men had to see for themselves that the promise was fulfilled.

Two thousand years later we don't get to see the risen Lord in the flesh. But in next weekend's Gospel about "doubting Thomas," our Lord will say, "*Blessed are those who do not see, and yet have come to believe.*" (John 20:29) Our faith is like a rheostat, right, one of those dials that ratchets light intensity or fan speed up and down? Our faith can be like a mustard seed,

starting out tiny and growing to be great, but in my experience it's not a **steady** increase – more like a couple steps forward, few steps back, few steps forward, couple steps back. Safe to say that since last Easter many of us have experienced bumps in the road. Money problems, medical worries, job difficulties, relationship heartaches, death, can try our faith greatly. At some point (or more than once) we may have asked, “If God is real, all-powerful and all-loving, why am I suffering like this?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” has long been on the lips of people other than Jesus, including the psalmist He quoted from the cross.

When we don't find what we're looking for exactly where we expect to find it we get frustrated. When we don't find Jesus where we expect Him to be, we sometimes begin to look for Him in all the wrong places. Then the Holy Spirit asks us, *“Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery?”* “How do you expect to find abundant life, strength and joy for the journey, courage to overcome your fear, an antidote for your anxiety, comfort for your sorrow, anywhere other than in His Word, His Sacraments, and in the community of faith?” So let's keep in mind the empty tomb. The bad news: He's not where we thought He'd be. The Good News: He is risen, as He said. *“Blessed are those who do not see, and yet have come to believe.”* None of us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have physically seen the risen Lord, but many of us have experienced His life-giving presence: in the Word, in Holy Baptism, in the Holy Supper, in the community of faith, and in the last, the lost and the least. God still sends angels to announce the resurrection, but they are **earth** angels – through whom God channels answers to our prayers, and who are brave to share their personal experience of the risen Lord lifting them up from death to life in **this** lifetime. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ strikes some as “the babbling of a fevered and insane mind,” but to us it is the antidote for our sin sickness and the balm for all our sorrow -- believe it or not. Amen

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 293.  
Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

