

## Sermon: Sunrise Reflection

Year C, Easter

[Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18; Luke 24:1-12](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?* (Luke 24:5) Because we're really good at it. We know what to expect, and we're extremely good at seeing what we expect to see. Think about it. God created the heaven and the earth, gave it over to us to steward and what happened? Children live for only a few days, and no one is surprised. (Isaiah 65:25) Old people die before their time (Isaiah 65:25) and no one is surprised. You put all your efforts into buying and fixing up a house, you miss a payment or two and suddenly someone else is living there. (Isaiah 65:21) You do all the work for a big project at the office and someone else gets the credit. (Isaiah 65:21) You bear children and the calamity of fentanyl comes along and they are lost (Isaiah 65:23). No one is surprised at any of that. We may be saddened, empathetic, but we're not shocked. It's the way the world works.

Don't get me wrong, we care deeply. We the living show up with spices to anoint the dead because we care. We the living show up in the graveyard at dawn in a group, because no one should go do this work alone. We look for the living among the dead because there is so much death and destruction around us. There's no where else for the living to be.

Sure, we'd like a new heaven and a new earth. Preferably not a burn-it-all-down, flood-the-earth, rainbow-and-dove approach. Something where everyone gets a do over. I'd like to be a little taller, more athletic, not so near sighted. I'd love to be able to read music. And if God could make the folks on the other end of the political spectrum a little less insane, man that would be an upgrade. But we don't expect a new heaven and a new earth. Who would? It's not reasonable to expect anything other than what we've got.

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Because we're so good at it. We're so good at settling for small little lives that echo with *sound of weeping* and *the cry of distress* (Isaiah 65:19). No one was surprised that the authorities killed Jesus of Nazareth. He stood up to them. He called them on their hypocrisy. He pointed out how plain old mean they were. Sure, to him. But they were mean to lots and lots of people. He was making people think. Making people realize that the world may be full of wolves and lions (Isaiah 65:25) but it didn't mean that the lambs and the oxen just had to take it. (Isaiah 65:25). No one was surprised when the authorities killed Jesus.

And frankly, the women probably weren't overly surprised to find the stone rolled away (Luke 24:2) and no body in the tomb (Luke 24:3). After everything they put Jesus through, was anyone surprised that some fanatical nut job decided that his body could not be allowed to rest in peace? It says they were *perplexed* (Luke 24:4), which is the perfect description for a group of women who are here to do a tough job and the job has gotten even tougher.

When the two men suddenly show up, the women at the tomb know it's not good. It's never good when strangers show up at the crack of dawn. Especially in dazzlingly clothes (Luke 24:4). I have two shirts with me today, in case I spill coffee on myself between here and now and the 10:00am service down there. I am *always* suspicious of anyone who can show up in dazzling clothes, let alone at early dawn (Luke 24:1). It doesn't say why the women were terrified and

bowed their faces to the ground (Luke 24:5). But we can guess. A group of women. Early morning in a place where no one is around. Two men show up. We know the music that plays under that scene from the movie and it's not the happy music.

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words.*

(Luke 24:5-8) They *remembered* Jesus' words. Their past hadn't changed. Everything they based their expectations on was exactly the same.

But the tomb *was* empty. And Jesus *had* said that thing about crucifixion and rising on the third day. And when you put those two things together, maybe, maybe this is the first glimmer of the new heaven and the new earth. Maybe this is the beginning of the wolf and the lamb feeding together, and the lion and the ox shoulder to shoulder eating hay.

Maybe this is what it looks like when God reaches into the flow of human history and changes it forever. Maybe this is what the world looks like when there is no more crying and lamentation, when meanness is taken out of creation. God not only comes into this world as a regular human being, God overcomes the meanness we did to the Incarnate one.<sup>1</sup>

The women rush back to the disciples and share what they had seen, what they had figured out. I doubt they were surprised that the disciples thought it was an idle tale. (Luke 24:11) But the women knew they were right, knew that something world-transforming was going on and nothing was going to keep them from sharing what they had figured out. We had been reading the past all wrong. That when you see the Resurrection in the world, the past looks different too. Not so predictive. Not such a good indicator of what is to come. Our past no longer limits us to such a tiny span of outcomes. The empty tomb is creating all kinds of space, including in our own past histories, for a new heaven and a new earth to emerge.

Once you get past the shock that God resurrected Jesus, you realize that the promise that Jesus was only the first, that death will not triumph over any of us, shakes far more loose. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that this life is worth living and that our physical body is sacred; it is the guarantee that death is not the end of life and that there is a world beyond; it is the guarantee that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of Christ.<sup>2</sup> With all those guarantees, we can start to get better at looking for the living in so many more places. Like in our own past histories. Like in the futures which are opening up where no one *shall hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD*. (Isaiah 62:25)

The Easter miracle may be that Jesus promises that we are free to walk away from the constraints of our past into the infinite space of the new heaven and the new earth. Starting here and now, at early dawn, on this holy mountain, around which we live our lives. We can go home amazed, like Peter (Luke 24:12), that an empty tomb has created such space.

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<sup>1</sup> O. Benjamin Sparks, “Easter Day, Pastoral Perspective, Isaiah 65:17-25” in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 358.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*. [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 64.