

**SUNDAY Gospel of the Unseen “The Worst Thing Is Never the Last Thing”**

Scripture: Luke 24:1-11 (selected verses)

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 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? He is not here, but has risen.” ...Returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

**MONDAY Luke 24:1-12 “He isn’t here, but has been raised”**

Even Jesus’ death didn’t dim the women’s loyalty. They returned to Jesus’ tomb “very early in the morning on the first day of the week.” They went to care for his body as soon as the Sabbath laws (which he had challenged) allowed. They didn’t find his body, but did find two men in gleaming clothes who said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here, but has been raised.” They reported this to the eleven, but true to form for their day, “their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn’t believe the women.”

- Two men “in gleaming bright clothing” asked, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here, but has been raised.” (verses 5-6) Repeat those words as you ponder this photo of one site (empty) in Jerusalem that might have been Jesus’ tomb. In what ways does the fact that “he is not [in the tomb]” shape your life?
- “Peter ran to the tomb ... he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.” Surely if Luke invented this, it would say something like, “Peter saw the linen cloth and cried, ‘Yes—Jesus is risen!’” (And it would make no sense for grave robbers to take time to unwrap the body, leaving the cloth behind.) Luke showed clearly that not one disciple expected Jesus to rise, though Jesus had told them just that (cf. Luke 9:22). How vital to your faith are the eyewitness reports that Jesus told his disciples in advance what would happen, as well as the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the disciples didn’t believe the women, and they couldn’t recall your own words enough to believe them, either. Give me a heart that is attentive to your words, and willing to believe them. Amen.

**TUESDAY Luke 24:13-24 Puzzled followers: “They didn’t find his body”** Just as Luke shared details about Jesus’ birth that no other gospel included, his research found this unique story about the resurrection day. Jesus, unrecognized, walked with two disciples discussing recent events. They were disillusioned (“we had hoped”), sad about the crucifixion, and stunned that some women said Jesus’ body was not in the tomb. Note that these two followers gave no sign that they believed the report—just that it puzzled them.

- Scholar N. T. Wright noted, “It wasn’t simply ... that they couldn’t recognize him. This is a strange feature of the resurrection stories, in Matthew (28:17) and John (20:14; 21:4, 12) as well as here ... Jesus’ body, emerging from the tomb, had been transformed. It was the same, yet different—a mystery we shall perhaps never unravel until we ourselves share the same risen life.” In what ways does Easter make you long to share that risen life, to experience dimensions that for now remain mysterious to us?
- Cleopas, like the other disciples, was still in the grip of preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would be and do (cf. Luke 9:44-45). In what ways can preconceived ideas today make it harder for you to trust the Bible’s testimony? When have you found greater joy and peace after letting God alter or overturn some fixed idea you may have held for years?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, when I am discouraged, disillusioned or disbelieving, please come and join me on the road. It is at those times in particular that I need your living, loving presence with me. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY Luke 24:25-32 “Weren’t our hearts on fire?”**

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus interpreted for his discouraged followers “the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.” As he broke and blessed bread for them, they recognized him in a flash of insight and memory. His transformed body disappeared, but they joyfully realized that their hearts were “on fire” as Jesus made the Bible clear.

- Scholar William Barclay said this story “tells us of the ability of Jesus to make sense of things ... Jesus came and talked with them, and the meaning of life became clear and the darkness became light ... It is only in Jesus that, even in the bewildering times, we learn what life means.” Can you recall any “aha!” moments when something painful and puzzling suddenly made more sense in the light of Jesus’ love and grace?
- The two disciples on the road may well have been husband and wife (cf. John 19:25; “Clopas” and “Cleopas” were probably the same person). Verse 29 says they urged their unrecognized companion to stay with them. If they hadn’t, they’d have missed the awesome moment when they knew he was Jesus. How urgent are you, individually and as a family, about inviting Jesus into your life? How have you learned to recognize his presence in the midst of everyday life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want you, I need you, to be with me in my home life. Help me, like Cleopas and Mary, to remember to invite you to stay with me at every meal, and every moment. Amen.

## **THURSDAY Luke 24:33-49 “You are witnesses”**

After meeting the risen Christ at Emmaus, the two disciples rushed back to share the news with the others. As they were speaking, Jesus himself appeared. Luke reported in detail that he was no ghost, but physically alive. Jesus again explained the Scriptures to the disciples, and commissioned them to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. “You are witnesses,” he said, promising that God’s power would help them spread his message.

- Jesus conquered death, robbing evil of its greatest power. As Pastor Hamilton says every Easter, the resurrection means that “the worst thing is never the last thing.” That is good news—celebrate and praise God! But Jesus’ words in verse 48 apply to you today as much as they did to his first disciples. Jesus called you to share that hope with others. In what ways can you be a “witness” and share the hope of the resurrection this week? Next week? Throughout the next year?
- Jesus’ summary of his message in verse 47 was “the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations.” In what ways does believing that Christ rose from the dead change your heart and life? How does the resurrection make credible for you Jesus’ claim to have the divine authority to forgive your sins?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, I am so grateful that you conquered death and offer me the hope of resurrection! Help me to rejoice in that hope, and to be your witness, sharing that hope with others. Amen.

## **FRIDAY Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-8 Wait for God’s power**

From the gospel of Luke, Jesus’ story continued directly into “volume 2,” the book of Acts. Before leaving earth, Jesus charged his followers to witness to him, but not based on their own courage or cleverness. Instead, they were to wait for the Holy Spirit’s power. Some have even suggested that instead of “Acts of the Apostles,” we might better call Luke’s second volume something like “the Acts of Jesus through the apostles.”

- In Acts 1:15, we read that “the family of believers” included about 120 people. In that light, consider the vast, ever-expanding scope of the task Jesus set before them: “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” How did Jesus’ vision and commission make it imperative for his family of believers to always keep a mission-driven, outward focus for their life together?
- Jesus ordered his disciples “not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised.” We Americans tend to be driven and impatient people. How would you react if Jesus told you not to try to do important work for him on your own, without God’s power? What spiritual risks can “going it alone” pose for a Christ-follower?

**Prayer:** Jesus, I love the sheer audacity of telling 120 people in a small Roman province that they should reach “to the end of the earth.” I love the Holy Spirit’s power that enabled them to carry out that mission. Give me that vision today, and that power. Amen.

## **SATURDAY Acts 1:9-14 Not the end—but a beginning**

Luke wanted Theophilus (and all other readers) to know Jesus' story didn't end in Jerusalem with the cross and the resurrection, or even the ascension. The risen Jesus told his followers that the saving work he had begun would go on through the rest of human history and into eternity. The risen Lord left earth, but two men in white told them this was not the end of Jesus' story—he would return. His followers devoted themselves to prayer to prepare for the huge task that now lay before them.

- The *CEB Study Bible* notes that verse 14 is like the opening note of a theme that runs through the story of the early Christians in Acts: “The spirit of unity and the practice of prayer are major features of community life (cf. Acts 2:1, 42-44; 3:1; 4:23-32; 6:6; 13:1-3; 16:13, 16; 20:36-37; 21:5).” Remember, some of this company were arguing about which of them would be the greatest at the Last Supper (cf. Luke 22:24), and they would have disagreements in the years ahead (e.g. Acts 15). What was their spirit of unity based on? That same spirit of unity is as crucial for us to carry out the mission Jesus gave us as it was for them. In what ways can you cultivate a spirit of unity, not of division, in your service to God?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, Isaiah said you would be “the prince of peace.” Help me, as a member of your diverse, worldwide family of believers, to live out the spirit of unity and peace your Spirit brought about in the first group of believers. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Jesus chose women to be the first people to share the news of his resurrection! Research the women in Bible. With younger children, use a Bible story book and discover how many stories of women are told. With older kids, use a concordance or the Internet to explore the stories of women. You may also want to discover how many names of women are mentioned whose stories are not told. Read a few of the stories and describe the qualities of the women mentioned. Discuss what their stories teach us about God. Think of the women in your life today and compare Biblical women with them. Write a note to a woman who displays God-like qualities. Thank her for sharing her faith. As a family, commit to praying for the special women in your life.

This study was adapted from The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.