**Easter Sunday, Year C - March 31, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Luke 24:1-12 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Why do you look for the living among the dead?**

*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. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5In 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? 6He 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.’ ” 8Then they remembered his words.*

*9When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12Peter, 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.*

Two weeks ago someone asked me, “Pastor, I know this might be an odd request, but can I sit down with you and plan my funeral?” It was an odd request. This individual is young, very healthy and lives an active life. There are not, by any means, on death’s door. At the same time I don’t think it’s an odd request. Christians understand that no matter where we are in life we are close to death. The Christian understands that the funeral is meant to give comfort to the survivors. And so, sitting down their pastor over a cup of coffee, carefully choosing the Bible passages that will be read, and the hymns that will be sung, tells the family, “I thought about you. When you come to my funeral, in the midst of your grief, I want you to hear these words and to remember them for your comfort and healing.”

Jesus also planned his funeral, didn’t he? And he carefully chose the words that his friends would hear from his angelic preacher, **“He is not here; he has risen! Remember what he told you!”**

But you probably didn’t come to church this morning to choose Bible passages for your funeral, much less think about death. Today is a happy day. We are dressed in our Sunday best. There are brand new stained glass windows. The choir and band traveled all the way from Wisconsin this morning to resound Jesus’ praises, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” But before he could rise, Jesus had to suffer. He had to die. And his friends didn’t quite grasp that truth on the first Easter Sunday morning.

After Jesus died on the afternoon of the day we call Good Friday, two godly men, Joseph, from the town of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, lowered Jesus’ lifeless corpse from his bloodied cross, and took it to a tomb Joseph had cut out of rock, a new tomb in which no one had been laid to rest. But they had to hurry. It was Preparation Day, the day before the Jewish Sabbath, a day on which the Jews did not work. The Sabbath began at sundown on Friday evening. Quickly these two faithful followers wrapped his body in linens and laid it in Joseph’s tomb. The women, stood at a distance, watching. These were women who had supported Jesus and his disciples throughout his earthly ministry. They wanted to give their Teacher a proper burial. But they would have to wait until Sunday.

They got out of bed while it was still dark. While the sun was rising over the Mount of Olives, they discussed, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?” But when they shuffled into the garden, they saw that the stone had been rolled away! How would you feel if you arrived to visit grave of a loved one, only to see a big hole in the ground, the casket open, and no body? Or course they were perplexed and astonished. They saw no one in the tomb. Only the strips of linen that had been wrapped around Jesus’ body, neatly folded in the place where he had been laid. And the, two angels stood next to them, dazzling white, like lightning. You know how bright that flash of lightning is when it streaks across the sky. Imagine it right next to you! Of course they would fall with their faces to the ground. But these angels were not there to destroy, but serve as heralds, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember what 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.”**

Jesus had shared these words with them many times, especially within the past year. He had stressed the necessity of his impending death. But he always concluded with the promise, **“I will rise on the third day.”** But the women forgot. His disciples forgot. The angels had to ask, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”**

When I was a sophomore in high school my uncle took me to Six Flags Magic Mountain in California. We spent the entire day and night in the park until they shut down the roller coasters. We walked back to the parking lot, where we thought my uncle had parked the car, but it wasn’t there. We spent the next hour walking up and down the rows upon rows of departing vehicles in the mammoth sized parking lot. We couldn’t find his car. We knew we had parked by the enormous roller coaster that hugged the parking lot, we had talked about it when we arrived. We thought that surely his car must have been stolen. How were we going to get home? We even flagged down a security officer. He took down our information and said he would return. We eventually decided to walk one more section down from where we were certain we had parked, but we were convinced that it couldn’t be that far down… and there it was…

Has that ever happened to you? You’ve gone looking for something, and you cannot find it, because you were looking in the wrong place? This happens to us, even as Christians, doesn’t it? Especially in times of trouble... When your marriage is threatening to break down, where do you go? Instead of talking about with your spouse, or seeking pastoral counseling, you complain to others, or don’t do anything at all to build your marriage. When the doctor calls with results from the lab, and your response is, “Oh… I see…” where do you go to find strength to get through it? Sometimes Christians curl up into a ball and cry, fearful of the future, instead of running to God and seeking his Word, which is full of promise and hope.

Where do you go to deal with your combat stress, the difficulties at school with friends, grades, when you are uncertain about which career path to take, when a friend or loved one dies… where do you look first for help? Too often we forget what Jesus promised us in his Word. Instead we mope around, feeling sorry for ourselves, or run to other places and other people, and try to find hope and strength or some way out, but it’s not there. We maybe even run to ourselves and think that somehow we can pull ourselves up and get through this on our own grit and determination. How well is that working out for you?

What we’re really doing is ignoring God, despising his Word and admitting, “Your promises aren’t true for me. They won’t help. They won’t give strength. I’ll just do this on my own.” We often forget Jesus’ promises, especially in times of trouble, but that’s the sinful human heart. And because that is the nature of our sinful hearts, we must talk about death today. For our holy God demands we trust him with our whole hearts, God demands that we seek him first when in trouble or hurt or afraid. Because we have not, he says we deserve death, not just the kind that puts us six feet under the ground, but eternal death, eternal separation from him and his grace.

One of the things children especially like about Easter is the Easter egg hunt. I think that parents and grandparents have just as much fun hiding the eggs and watching the children find the eggs. Sometimes children are surprised to find eggs in places they wouldn’t expect to find them. The same is true with our God. He is a righteous God who demands righteousness from us, but we cannot provide it, and so he demands death as payment. But we find that he is also the same God who provides that payment. The proof is in the place where Jesus’ friends least expected it, the empty tomb.

Jesus’ resurrection on Easter morning is proof that God the Father accepted his Son’s death as the payment for the death we deserve. If Jesus had not believed all of his Father’s promises, if he had not always trusted in his Father in times of trouble, if Jesus had not carried the burden of our sins in himself, and did not allow his Father to punish him with death in our place, then we could hop on a plane today, fly to Jerusalem and find Jesus’ bones still in his grave. But his grave is vacant. Jesus’ body was brought back to life from death. He physically lives today, and that is proof that the Father accepted Jesus’ payment on our behalf. Jesus died because of our sins, and the Father raised his body to life again because Jesus provided everything for you and me to be forgiven and to go to heaven.

My friends, why did you come to church this Easter morning? Not for an egg hunt, not for breakfast, that’s next week. Are you looking for the assurance that your sins are forgiven? Then look in the empty tomb. Are you trying to figure out if you are right with God? Then look in the empty tomb. Are you wondering, “What will happen to me after I die?” Then run with me and the women to the empty tomb and hear the angels say to us, “Remember what he told you…” We need to hear Jesus’ words, so that we too may believe and know that our sins are forgiven, that we are right with God, that my body will rise again on the Last Day, and it will rise to live in heaven forever. We know this to be true because Jesus is alive! We know this to be true because Jesus lives! Listen to Jesus, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25,26) “Because I live, you too, shall live.”**  Yes, the resurrection of the dead is yours, eternal life is yours, through faith in Jesus.

And because this is true, then the other thing that you seek will be yours. When you find yourself stepping off an airplane in Afghanistan, or at home worrying about your Soldier, or sitting in counseling with your spouse, or lying on the operating table, or kneeling at the bed of a loved one, when you don’t know where else to run, then run to the empty tomb and you’ll find what you need to hear, **“He is not here; he has risen!”** Yes, Jesus’ resurrection gives you the power and the strength and comfort to face whatever it is you will face in this world. For since Jesus has conquered your sins and your grave, his Word will strengthen you in life and in death.

That’s why we will keep coming back to church for worship and Bible study, not just on Easter and Christmas, or for weddings and funerals. So that you may say to someone who does not know where to run, “Remember what Jesus told you?” This is why people come to their pastor and say, “Can I plan my funeral?” So that when your remains are lying in a casket or urn, and your family and friends are gathered in the church, the pastor will say to them, “Remember what Jesus told you; your loved one is not here. Their souls are in heaven! This body will rise again someday, and live forever, for Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!