

## **Sermon: Why do you look for the living among the dead?**

Today is Easter, and we have spent the last six weeks following Jesus and his disciples on the road to Jerusalem. Last week we witnessed Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But a lot happened in that one week between Palm Sunday and Easter, this week that we often call Holy Week.

Let me recap the events of Holy Week for you. On Monday and Tuesday, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders escalated. On Wednesday Judas met with the religious leaders and arranged for Jesus' betrayal. On Thursday Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room and shared the Last Supper with them. Later that same night he was arrested while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Early Friday morning Jesus was tried before Pilate and sentenced to death. By Friday evening Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. Saturday was a Sabbath day of rest.

And so, at last we come to Sunday morning. Only seven days had passed since the triumphal entry, but so much had happened in between. Imagine how the disciples felt at this moment. They were in shock from the events of Thursday and Friday. They were in mourning over the death of their Lord and friend. And they were hiding in fear for their own lives. Jesus had warned them that the road to Jerusalem was the road to suffering and the cross, but somehow, they did not understand. But now Sunday morning had arrived, and everything was about to change.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" That is a great question! We do not normally look for the dead among the living. So why would you look for the living among the dead? That is the question the angels posed to the women who came to Jesus' tomb that first Easter morning. And it is the question I would like for us to consider this morning as well.

Verse 1 says, "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." On Good Friday, right after Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea received permission to

bury Christ's body in his own tomb. The women who had attended Jesus followed Joseph. They saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it. They then rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

Now it was Sunday morning, and the women made their way to the tomb. Luke tells us it was very early in the morning. Some of you have gotten up early on Easter Sundays to attend an Easter Sunrise service. You can relate with these women! Sometimes it's still dark, and it's not easy getting out of bed. But you obviously feel there is something of greater value than sleeping in on Easter morning. So, you get up early, and you go to the sunrise service.

Well, these women also felt there was something more important than sleeping in that Easter morning. And so, they got up. They took the spices they had prepared, and they went to the tomb. Why did they bring the spices? Out of love and respect for their crucified Lord, they were going to anoint his body in the grave. In other words, they went fully expecting to find Jesus dead and buried in the tomb.

Instead, "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." They were looking for Jesus among the dead, and they did not find him.

Many people are still looking for Jesus among the dead. I think of biblical scholars who study the words of Jesus and the gospel manuscripts but do not believe in Christ's resurrection.

I think of the archaeologists who two thousand years later are still trying to find Jesus' body and bones in the tomb but keep coming up empty. I think of people who finger the sculpted body of Christ on their crucifixes but do not know the reality of the living Christ. These people all have one thing in common. They are all looking for Jesus among the dead. But if you are looking for Jesus among the dead, you will not find him. Because he is not there.

Frank Morison was a pseudonym for a man known as Albert Henry Ross (1881 – 1950) who was an English advertising agent and freelance writer. He was skeptical regarding the resurrection of Jesus, and set out to analyze the sources and to write a short paper entitled Jesus – the Last Phase to demonstrate the apparent myth.

He went looking for Jesus among the dead. He was not a Christian. Although he admired the person of Jesus, he was a skeptic who felt that these stories about Jesus were nothing more than a myth or legend, especially the story of the resurrection.

So, he had a brilliant idea. Why not prove that the resurrection never happened? Why not use his own research skills as a journalist to dig into history and prove that Jesus never rose from the dead? He would do his research, and then he would write a book presenting the historical facts about Christ and the events surrounding his death. And so he went looking for Jesus among the dead.

And you know what? He never found him. What he did find is exactly what Luke says in our passage this morning. He found the stone rolled away, but he did not find the body of Jesus. Instead, he found the risen Christ, and he put his faith in him as Lord and Savior.

He wrote up his research in a famous book called, *Who Moved the Stone?* I especially love the title of the first chapter, “The Book that Refused to Be Written.”

He had set out to write a book disproving the resurrection of Christ. Instead, he ended up writing what has become a Christian classic presenting the evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

He went looking for Jesus among the dead. But he did not find him there. And you will not find him there either. If you want to find Jesus this morning, you can’t go looking among the dead. You must go looking among the living! And that brings us to the good news of Easter.

“While the women were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.” These were clearly not ordinary men. They appeared out of nowhere. Their clothes were shining like lightning. The other gospels confirm to us that these were indeed angels. These were messengers sent from God with their clothing still burning bright with the glory of heaven.

In the Bible whenever an angel appears in glory, one thing always happens. People fall down on their faces in fear. It is an instinctive reaction. Angels are majestic and glorious beings, and we fall down before them. The women at the tomb were no different. In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.

The angels asked the women: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! 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.’” Then they remembered his words.

Jesus told his followers again and again what would happen to him when they got to Jerusalem. He told them that he would suffer. He told them that he would be crucified. He told them that on the third day he would rise from the dead.

So, Jesus’ arrest should not have been a surprise to his followers. Jesus’ crucifixion and death should not have been a surprise either. And even Jesus’ resurrection should not have been a surprise. Jesus told them about all these things in advance. And yet somehow the meaning of these things escaped them. It was only after these things had happened that they remembered his words and put it all together.

And so it was that these women showed up with spices at Jesus’ grave on Easter morning looking for a dead man. The angels rightly asked them:

“Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

That is the good news of Easter. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death and the grave. He rose from the dead on Easter morning. He is alive and well today. You will not find him among the dead, for he is among the living. And he offers new life to you.

The Bible tells us that those who trust in Christ, we will share in his resurrection. The fear of death and judgment is taken away.

And so, only one question remains. How will you respond?

Are you a believer in Jesus’ resurrection this morning? If so, then you need to share your faith with others, just like the women at Jesus’ tomb did. Jesus died, but he rose again from the dead. He is alive forevermore. That is good news! And good news is for sharing.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Let me say it to you again. If you are looking for Jesus among the dead, you will never find him, because he is not there. But if you look for Jesus among the living, if you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will find him, and you will be saved. Jesus Christ is alive. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen