

Sermon – Luke 24:1-12
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Grace Lutheran Church
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“Nobody Expects the Savior’s Resurrection!”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

1. If they were sure of anything, it was this: He was dead. There was just no way around it. He had died, and that was that. Suddenly, however, they found something they weren’t looking for, heard sounds for which their ears were unprepared. In a moment, everything changed. And what happened next? Well, I have no idea. The next *Star Wars* movie doesn’t come out until Christmas. But did you see the new trailer last week, revealing that Emperor Palpatine might not really be dead, in spite of the fact that we all saw him go down with the second Death Star? Wait, you knew I was talking about *Star Wars*, right? I confess I might care about this more than you do! Still, even in idle tales we expect death to be the end. As in a galaxy far, far away, so for a man from Galilee a long time ago. If his friends were sure of anything, it was that he was dead. There was just no way around it. He had died and that was that. They’d seen him with their own eyes, hanging on the cross. But suddenly, at the tomb, they found something they weren’t looking for; instead of their friend’s corpse they see two men in dazzling clothes, speaking words they were unprepared to hear: “He is not here, but has risen.” What happens next? Everything changes.
2. Of course it seems an idle tale, no more real than science fiction, even if Jesus himself had insisted it would happen. But as the truth dawns on them, the women move from sorrow to fear to joy. They go from the tomb, hearts aflame, to tell the disciples. The men dismiss the women out of hand. But slowly over the course of that day, over the next forty days, Jesus would

- make it abundantly clear to them that he was alive. That he had been raised. That in his dying the forces of sin, death, and the devil that had seemingly triumphed had, in fact, been put to rout; that in his rising from the tomb the world was being put to rights. That God had said “No” to this world’s “No,” and was now saying “Yes!” to life, abundant and eternal. This is the very same gift that comes to you this day. And it is no idle tale. It is the story of a God who refuses to let go of this world that God loves so much. So much that Jesus was willing to die to redeem it; to rise to reclaim it; to live to resurrect it.
3. Twentieth-century theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg once said: “The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.” It is that second reason, I think, that made the women in the tomb fearful at first; that made the men disbelieve the women’s witness; that fuels our own doubts today. After all, if Jesus who was crucified is now alive, everything changes. To be sure, we can no more prove that Jesus was raised from the dead that we could prove he wasn’t, and I’m not going to waste time this morning with persuasion. We don’t need human persuasion; no, what we are in desperate need of is Easter proclamation. Words spoken outside an empty tomb proclaiming that Christ is alive and death is dead. Words strongly commanding *and* gently inviting us into resurrection living – life lived on the other side of death, today. And what happens next? Everything changes. You change. You, once dead, find yourself coming to life.
 4. This past Monday we watched in shock as Notre Dame, the great cathedral of Paris, burned. Since its foundation was laid in the twelfth century, Notre Dame has been more than an architectural marvel. It has been a sanctuary of hope and a beacon of light, drawing many into the arms of Notre Dame’s Son: Jesus Christ. As it burned, as its steeple toppled, we feared that there would be nothing left. But after the night, morning. After the fire, out of the ashes,

hope. The first photo many of us saw on Tuesday morning was of a cross, still standing, in the midst of the wreckage. Much was saved, but it will never be the same. But now, there is an opportunity not only for reconstruction, but for signs of resurrection, transformative in power and grace. Notre Dame will be rebuilt, but that's not all. Along with our sorrow at seeing this great treasure burn, we were reminded of the three churches in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, that also burned. Churches that burned not from accident, but arson. And with attention, money has been raised to help these churches rebuild, too. Conversations have swirled around issues of whether or not money for the cathedral's reconstruction would be better spent on people in need. These are good conversations, but insofar as matters are perceived as either/or, they are conversations symptomatic of a life lived without resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that death is not the end and that there are now neither endings nor limits. We don't live in a zero-sum game but in God's unlimited abundance. Resurrection means changing the way we live. Resurrection reminds us that both beauty and justice, both spiritual transcendence and everyday human dignity, are important to God, and the resurrection of Jesus gives us both courage and call to tend to it all.

5. In responding to Jesus' resurrection and his persistent, loving insistence that we leave behind the tomb as well, we discover the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. The Spirit that enables us first to believe that Jesus lives, and then to believe that we are truly alive. If both those things are true – and believe me, this is no idle tale – then we are not simply able to change our way of life; we find it impossible *not* to change. Stepping forth with Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary, and eventually even the men, we find ourselves blinking as we stare into Son's glory as a new morning dawns. What happens next? Everything changes. God unfolds a new vision for life, in this world and the next.

6. In his resurrection, and in ours, we have become the body of Christ, alive and at work in the world for the sake of beauty and justice. Unlike Notre Dame, or Grace, or any other work of faithful beauty, we have been built up as living stones upon the stone that was once rejected but has become the chief cornerstone. He is the foundation of the new Kingdom against which sin, death, and the devil don't stand a chance. The one thing we were sure of was death. The last thing we expected was resurrection. And yet here we are, world without end, wrapped up in the eternal embrace of the crucified Christ. In his name, by his power, how can our lives *not* change? What can we not do?

7. And as for today, what happens next? Well, in the poetic words of Wendell Berry: "Practice resurrection." There is nothing more subversive in the face of a world that believes death is the end. Live like Jesus is alive, because he is. Live like you're alive, because you are. There's nothing the world less expects, but also nothing that the world needs more. This is no idle tale. It is the unending story of the God who died for you, the God who lives for you, the God who calls you out of death and into life, the God who holds you now forever. Sin is forgiven. Death is dead. And that is that. What happens next? Everything changes. So go: Practice resurrection. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!