

Sermon – Luke 24:1-12  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Easter – Year C  
20 April 2025

“Amazed”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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

1. On a cool, sunlit Thursday morning just a few weeks ago, our family crossed the Potomac. Not wanting to miss the next occurrence, we skipped the shuttle bus and made our way by foot up along the rolling hills of what once was the estate and plantation of the Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Now, of course, its verdant fields are dotted with row upon row upon row of gravestones, upon whose white marble the daylight dappled. Our destination at Arlington was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We arrived in time for the Changing of the Guard. With hundreds of others, we observed the solemn ceremony in which the new takes the watch from the previous sentinel, part of an endless procession of soldiers from The Old Guard who bear constant watch and witness to the sacrifice of our nation's war dead. After the Changing of the Guard, the crowd dispersed but we stayed to see another ceremony, one in which a fresh floral wreath was presented. During this second ceremony, a lone bugler marched out and sounded the somber twenty-four notes of "Taps." As the last note hung in the spring air, we started the walk back. It was a beautiful moment, and an important one to share with our children. It was poignant and moving, just as we'd expected. But it didn't change a darn thing. The marble edifice, like the hundreds of

thousands of headstones around it, was unmoved, every bit as stubborn and solid as the moment before.

2. Graves have a way of responding in exactly the way you'd expect. We can only wonder at the palette of emotions coloring the hearts of Mary, Joanna, Mary, and the other women who boldly went to the tomb of Jesus early that morning. But whatever they were feeling, they knew what to expect. The body of their friend, their teacher, the One in whom they'd placed their desperate hopes, would be there. Death is dependable that way. Surprise is always, well, surprising, but it didn't even seem a possibility that day. The stone would be there, solid and stubborn as sin and death. They went anyway, of course, drawn by duty and love. Duty and love but not hope.
3. Not long ago, I was at a funeral with other pastors. As we ate ham sandwiches in the basement after the service, we got to talking about *our* funerals. We'd all have them one day, after all. What did we hope would be said about us? The first pastor said, "I hope they remember my preaching," she said. "That I always spoke the gospel with truth and clarity for the comfort of anxious and weary souls. I hope someone thinks of that." My next colleague spoke, saying, "I hope they say, 'You know, he was always there for us. At our celebrations and in our sorrows, Pastor showed up for us, reminding us that God shows up, too.'" We looked to the one who hadn't spoken yet. He asked, "What do I hope to hear at *my* funeral? I hope someone points and says, 'I think I see him moving!'"
4. There is, of course, nothing funny about death. We all carry with us those who are not here. Parent, sibling, friend. Spouse, child. Grief is less solid but no less stubborn than stone. Nevertheless, today in our grief we walk with the women in their grief to the tomb of Jesus and find that everything, *everything*, has changed. The unmovable stone is moved. The body is gone. Instead, two men, messengers, in dazzling clothes greet them: "Why do you

look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen?" Jesus is on the move! Jesus had tried to prepare them for this, but who can be ready for the undoing of death itself? But this is the work for which Jesus came, to forgive sin, defeat evil, and undo death. There is, by the way, nothing given about this. It would not have happened on its own. There is nothing about this life that would live on by its own power without the grace of the Creator God who insists upon loving God's creatures. Resurrection, Frederick Buchner writes, "is entirely unnatural. [We do] not go on living beyond the grave because that's how [we are] made. Rather, [we go to our] grave as dead as a doornail and [are] given [our] life back again by God just as [we were] given it by God in the first place, because that is the way God is made." Resurrection is the insistence of God to love all of God's creation, declaring it all – even you, even me – so beloved that not a bit of it will be lost. God is drawing us in forever. All of us. Each of us.

5. Of course, resurrection therefore makes the audacious claim that *this* life matters, too. Easter is not an escape hatch into an alternate reality. It is God's insistence that creation matters, both in the future of newness *and* the new now. The first fruits of the resurrection, after all, is Jesus. Jesus, a political prisoner whose death was a mockery, a perversion of justice. Jesus was put to death because the gospel of love, forgiveness, and welcome was too wide for this world to abide. His resurrection is a vindication of his message, a clarion call for us to not simply wait for life in the next world but to work for life here. That all of God's children would know lives of dignity and fullness, here and now. That none would be seen or cast aside as less than. The empire attempted to disappear Jesus but, in the grandest lark of all, he disappeared from them. Jesus is on the move, moving us into works of service and solidarity which, by the grace of Christ, are stronger than stone. Stronger than empire. Stronger than death.

6. We join the struggle for life in its fullness because we know – and are known by – Life in its fullness. His name is Jesus. His open tomb opens our tombs to God's unending future life. Jesus is moving among the living, calling us from death to life. And one day that call will draw us out of our stoney bondage, blinking in the light of dawn's new day. We will not hear a mournful bugle but the bold trumpets of the angelic host. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Death has been swallowed up forever. The most amazing thing of all, the least idle tale of all. Rise up, friends, and follow the Christ who is on the move. Rise up, friends, and follow the Christ who has work for you to do in this world. Rise up, friends, and follow the Christ by whose victory the trumpet shall sound, calling you out of your tomb. In the reign of God there are none who are unknown or forgotten. Listen! You can hear it even now. Rise up. Amen.

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

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.