

Why Do You Seek the Living One Among the Dead?

Introduction

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!

People of God, this morning we return in spirit to the dawning of the new creation, when the stone was rolled away, and the grave was found empty. Death was stripped of its sting, and the power of Christ's resurrection life had broken into the world.

But here at the tomb the angels asked the holy women a question, a question that would split history in two:

“Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?”

That question echoes down the through the ages into every generation. And every single person must answer it for him or herself. Everyone thinks they are looking for Life, but they do so among the tombs of idolatry, ideology, dead spirituality, false religions, and lifeless pursuits of pleasure and possessions.

The Lord is risen and has gone ahead of us. Let us put away our obsession with death, and seek the Living One.

In this passage, we witness three movements that reveal the shape of resurrection faith:

- From **confusion** to **clarity**,
- From **memory** to **mission**,
- And from **faithless marveling** to **faithful marveling**.

Let us walk with these women to the tomb, and hear again the question that changes everything.

I. The Crisis of Confused Expectations (vv. 1–4)

The women came to the tomb at the liminal hour of “**deep dawn**”—that sacred threshold when night yields to light, when grief meets hope, and when the veil between death and life is thinnest. This was no ordinary morning. It was the dawn of the new creation.

If we are attentive readers of Scripture, our theological memory should stir: “**On the first day... while it was still dark.**” This is Genesis 1 all over again. Before God said, “*Let there be light*,” the earth was formless, void, and cloaked in deep darkness. And so it is again. Before the light of the resurrection breaks forth, the women walk through the shadow of death to tend to the crucified body of their Lord.

This darkness is not merely physical—it is spiritual. Sin, sorrow, and death weigh heavy. The Creator has died, and creation groans under its burden. In faithful devotion, the women carry oil and spices honor their crucified Lord. They come bearing the fragrance of death unto death.

But for those who believe, that same fragrance becomes, as Paul says, a **fragrance of life unto life** (2 Corinthians 2:16). Because Christ's death is not death, it is life and salvation, because His resurrection transforms the tomb into womb.

They expect to find the tomb sealed and guarded. After all, Pilate had posted Roman soldiers at the request of the chief priests, who feared Jesus' words about rising again. But when the women arrive—**there is no guard, no seal, and no stone**. The tomb is open. And when they step inside—it is empty.

What a holy irony: The Christian faith is built on the fact that the women found **nothing**—and yet, they stood on the precipice of discovering **everything**.

At first, they are perplexed. The silence of the empty tomb does not immediately declare life—it provokes questions. What has happened? Where is He?

Because facts alone do not produce faith. **The empty tomb must be explained.** Saving faith is born when the Spirit of

God opens the eyes of a person's heart to believe God's own interpretation of the facts, which is revealed in His Word. Only then do we truly see the risen Christ—not with earthly eyes, but with the eyes of faith.

II. The Revelation That Transforms (vv. 4–8)

As the women stand in confusion before the empty tomb, Luke writes:

“Behold—two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.”

These are no ordinary men. They are angels—messengers of God—sent to provide what the empty tomb alone cannot: **divine interpretation**. The women have the facts. But now they need the meaning. And it is this meaning that turns confusion into clarity.

Before we consider *what* the angels say, we must not overlook *how* they appear. Luke draws special attention to their dazzling garments. He is not just recording this detail because it happened, but to help further guide us into the meaning of the empty Tomb.

Their dazzling garments links this moment to a pivotal scene earlier in Luke's Gospel: **the Transfiguration** (Luke 9:29).

There, on the mountain, Jesus' face shone and His garments dazzled and flashed like lightning. He stood with Moses and Elijah, speaking of His **exodus**—His coming death and resurrection in Jerusalem. That moment offered a glimpse of Christ's glory that would come after his suffering and death on the cross, and His resurrection. But he shows it as a preview, that the disciples might know that His suffering and death was the plan from the beginning.

Now, here at the tomb, figures appear again. Like Moses and Elijah, they serve as divine interpreters of the Exodus that Jesus accomplished. But notice the difference: at the Transfiguration, **Jesus is the one who shines**. At the tomb, it is these two men, or angels that shine. But they are not shining with their own glory, but with they are reflecting the light of Christ's glory, a glory now associated with the **Word of Christ**.

They do not point the women to where Jesus is. They point them to **what Jesus said**.

“Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you,

while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day rise.”

Jesus first foretold his disciples about His death and resurrection, in Luke 9, right after Peter confessed Him as the Christ. Jesus said:

“The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected... be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

And immediately after saying this, He called His disciples to take up their own crosses daily and follow Him. And then the Transfiguration happens.

The order of these events is intentional, and purposeful, for it is repeated in all three synoptic Gospels: The Christ must suffer, die, rise on the third day, and enter into glory. That is the shape of His story—and it becomes the pattern for our story as well. We must follow Him through suffering and self-denial, and through death, in order to share in His resurrection and transfigured glory.

But we can only walk that path of glorification if we first walk **see Him in His Word by faith.** As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

And the context makes this clear—Paul is talking about beholding the glory of Christ **in the Scriptures**. We must look to Christ in the Scriptures, in His Word, and there the Spirit will transform us into the same image of glory as Christ.

This is the significance of the angels simple, and yet powerful instruction:

“Remember what He told you.”

And Luke tells us, **“And they remembered His words.”**

To **remember** here is more than recollection. It is **reception**. It is illumination. The Word of Christ, once heard but not understood, now lands on hearts opened by the Spirit, giving understanding. What once seemed like failure is now seen as fulfillment. What was just a moment of confusion has become the moment of clarity. The facts are the same—but now, because they are interpreted through the light of the Word of Christ, **Faith is born.**

Not by seeing, but by remembering.

Not by evidence alone, but by the Word believed.

Divine interpretation leads divine illumination.

This is how confusion gives way to clarity, bewilderment to belief, and death to resurrection hope.

So what do we make of the angels' dazzling garments? They are signposts of spiritual transformation. The glory that once radiated from Christ on the Holy Mountain, now shines through **His Word**—preached, remembered, and believed. That Word illuminates the darkness of the world, and of our own souls and reveals to us not only the glory of the risen Christ—but our own future glory in Him.

This is exactly what the apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 1.

¹⁶ For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷ For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

He is talking about his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. But where does that glory now shine – in the Word. He continues and says:

¹⁹ And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

It is not the historical event of the Transfiguration, which gives light to the heart. It is not even the historical event of the Resurrection of Christ which gives light to the heart. It is the Prophetic Word which confirms and interprets the event which the Holy Spirit uses to give light to the soul and which transforms us from glory to glory.

Which is what Peter means when he concludes and says:

²⁰knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

III. The Witness Met with Unbelief (vv. 9-12)

So, after the angels spoke these words, Luke says:

“And they remembered His words. Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.”

The women, like their Lord, are now transformed, because they remembered His words. They came to the tomb as mourners—but they leave as messengers. They came to

minister to the dead—but they are sent to proclaim the Living One. The first heralds of the risen Christ are not apostles, elders, or theologians—but faithful women, entrusted with the first gospel testimony.

Now, some have tried to use this passage to argue for women's ordination. But that is to miss the point entirely. This text is not **prescriptive**—it does not establish church polity—it is **descriptive**, narrating a historical moment when God overturned death. The point is not ecclesiastical structure. The point is **resurrection power** inherent in the Word, when divinely interpreted and testified internally by the Spirit.

What this passage also does is, it strengthens the historical credibility of the resurrection. In the ancient world, a woman's testimony was widely dismissed as unreliable. Women were viewed as emotionally unstable and their testimony was therefore legally inadmissible. That's what makes this account so striking.

If the Gospel writers were *inventing* the resurrection story, they would not have chosen women as the first witnesses. They would have chosen men—Peter, John, or another respected figure—to lend cultural weight to the story. But instead, all four Gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24,

John 20) unanimously name women as the first to see the empty tomb and hear the angelic announcement.

This is what historians call the *criterion of embarrassment*: if a detail would have been inconvenient or culturally awkward for the original audience, and yet it is still included, then it is more likely to be historically true. In other words, the Gospel writers didn't fabricate this—they faithfully recorded what actually happened.

But beyond evidential apologetics, this moment declares a profound theological truth: a divine reversal is underway. Just as the first woman was deceived and brought the message of death to the first man, now these women—illumined by the truth of the Word—bring the message of life to the apostles. The curse is being reversed. The resurrection is rewriting the story of Genesis. We have a New Creation story in Jesus.

Dear sisters in Christ, in Eden, the first woman was deceived, when she gave the fruit of the tree to the man. And because of that death entered the world. But now, as a result of the empty tomb, it is women who give the true word of the resurrection of Christ from his death on a tree to the Apostles. This is not the overturning of God's creational order, but a display of His how redemption restores what sin has broken.

In other words, this moment of grace does not destroy the biblical pattern of male leadership, now allowing for women's ordination. Not hardly. Paul clearly taught that women are not called to preach or exercise authority over men in the church. Yet you are most certainly called to be witnesses of the resurrection of Christ within your God-given sphere. You are called to pass the faith to the next generation.

And you are to adorn the gospel with reverent obedience, and—when needed—to lovingly call your husbands back to faithfulness to the Word. But as Peter teaches, that reminder comes not through brash argumentation, but through your respectful and pure conduct.

Sisters, you are no longer defined by Eve's fall, nor are you bound to repeat her sinful desire to rule over the man. You are daughters of Sarah, daughters of the Mary's, called to adorn the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable resurrection beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit—which is precious in God's sight.

The curse is being reversed. Christ is risen. And by God's grace, you are part of His glorious work of renewal.

But even as the women tell the apostles what happened, they did not immediately believe it. Luke tells us:

“These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

How tragic. These men had walked with Jesus, heard His teaching, seen His miracles, witnessed the power of His word over demons, disease, and death, and even participated in this power themselves. They had heard Him predict His death and resurrection multiple times. And still—they did not believe.

Let this stand as a sober warning: **Proximity to the truth does not guarantee reception of the truth.**

You can sit under sound preaching, read the Bible, sing the Psalms, partake of the Sacraments, and walk among the people of God—and yet remain in unbelief. As Paul said, many have “*the form of godliness, but deny its power.*”

What makes the difference? Not intelligence. Not zeal. Not even firsthand experience. The decisive difference is the **illumination of the Holy Spirit**, who alone opens the eyes of the heart to behold the risen Christ and believe. It is a supernatural work of God in the heart that makes all the difference in the world.

Faith does not arise from evidence alone. Faith is not the result of reasoned probability. **Faith is the gift of God.** As Paul says in Romans 10, “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.*”

This is why Paul also prays in Ephesians 1:

“*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you... and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe—according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*”

This is what the Spirit does through the Word. He takes what seems like “an idle tale” and makes it living truth. He takes cold dead hearts and sets them ablaze with truth and life. He takes doubters and makes them worshipers. He takes those dead in sin and breathes resurrection life into them. And he does through the preaching of the good news of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

Thus we must never be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

So let us not presume upon our nearness to the Word. Instead, let us pray that the Spirit would open our eyes, unstopp our ears, and awaken our hearts to the risen Christ in the Word. For only by His power can we know the hope of glory by faith.

And what of Peter? When he heard the news of the resurrection...

“Peter rose and ran to the tomb. Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he went home, marveling at what had happened.”

Peter marvels—but his marveling is not yet of faith. It is the beginning of wonder. It is the crack in the wall of disbelief. It is the stirring of the soul that senses something extraordinary has happened—but does not yet grasp its meaning.

Faith will come to Peter. Christ will seek him out. The Scriptures will be opened. And then, the marveling disciple will become a bold apostle of resurrection power.

Application: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Life

Now that we have stood at the empty tomb and heard the angel's question—"Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?"—we must ask:

What does this mean for us—and for the world?

Every culture, every religion, every philosophy is trying to answer the same aching question:

What is the meaning of life?

Why are we here?

What is our purpose?

What do we do with pain, with suffering, with death?

People build systems. They form ideologies. They chase enlightenment, morality, or personal identity, pleasure, or possessions. But there is only one place where the answer is found—at the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

As Jaroslav Pelikan once said:

"If Christ is not risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is risen—nothing else matters."

Jesus Christ rose from the dead. But unless we receive **God's interpretation** of that event, it means nothing. The resurrection is not just a miraculous event—it is **God's own**

answer to every one of our questions, and to the greatest problems in the world.

Without it, we're left groping in the dark—creating myths, inventing meaning, clinging to philosophies that cannot deliver. We are left searching for the living among the dead.

So let us consider how the resurrection of Christ answers what every other religion, cult, spirituality, worldview, or ideology attempts and fails to solve. Here are three broad categories of counterfeit belief systems—and how the resurrection of Jesus Christ stands in contrast to them all.

1. Spiritual or Transcendent Systems

These worldviews teach that meaning is found in escaping—escaping suffering, escaping the material world, escaping the self.

- **Hinduism** seeks **moksha**, release from the cycle of reincarnation.
- **Buddhism** aims for **nirvana**, the end of desire and pain, and to be united to the oneness of all.

- New Age spirituality longs for higher consciousness or cosmic unity.
- Some even look to **extraterrestrial beings** as guides to a more evolved plane of existence.

But Christianity does not teach escape—it teaches **redemption**.

We are not saved *from* creation, we are New Creations. The resurrection of Jesus affirms that the physical world is not something to be discarded, but something God has come to renew.

The body matters. History matters. Creation matters. Because Christ is risen, and we too shall rise. And we have hope in him who “*make all things new.*” – *Revelation 21:5*

2. Communal or Ethical Systems

These worldviews ground meaning in **moral effort**—doing good, improving society, upholding tradition, and preserving order. In these systems, human flourishing is achieved through ethical behavior, social cohesion, and religious observance.

- **Confucianism** teaches that meaning is found in **virtue and social harmony**. One fulfills their purpose by honoring elders, obeying social roles, and maintaining order. There is no concept of sin, salvation, or resurrection—only moral cultivation and the preservation of ancestral legacy.
- **Judaism**, especially in modern expressions, often seeks meaning through **human efforts to repair the world**, known as *tikkun olam*. This phrase, rooted in Kabbalistic mysticism, envisions restoring cosmic harmony, while rabbinic traditions emphasize justice and ethical conduct in this present age—frequently aligning with liberal political ideologies that aim for societal reform apart from the Messiah.
- **Islam** teaches that the purpose of life is to **submit to Allah** and live in obedience to His revealed will, as expressed in the Qur'an and Shariah law. Meaning is found in worship, moral conduct, and fulfilling religious duties like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Eternal reward is based on a person's deeds outweighing their sins. Islam has no Savior, no cross, and no resurrection. It offers law without atonement, submission without transformation.

- Progressive spiritual movements pursue **climate justice, global peace, and human unity**—often replacing the need for salvation with activism, and defining truth by social consensus rather than divine revelation.

Christianity affirms the value of justice, virtue, and community—but it denies that **any of these can save**. We are not redeemed by activism, moral reform, or religious observance. We are saved by the **resurrection of Jesus Christ**, who conquered death and inaugurated the **true new creation**.

The church is not a social movement. It is not an ethical society. It is **the new humanity**, born from the womb of the empty tomb—raised with Christ, reconciled to God, and empowered to walk in newness of life.

“Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” – Romans 6:4

3. Individualistic or Existential Systems

These worldviews declare that life has **no inherent meaning**—you must invent your own.

- **Existentialism** insists that purpose must be created in a meaningless universe.
- **Secular humanism** seeks truth in science, self-expression, and the pursuit of temporal fulfillment.
- **New Age individualism** teaches that you are your own god—that truth is personal, and salvation is self-discovery.

But Christianity proclaims that meaning is not invented—it is revealed.

You don't have to construct a reason to live out of nothing. Meaning has already come—in **flesh and blood, in crucifixion and resurrection.**

You were created by God, redeemed by Christ, and destined to rise in glory.

Purpose is not subjective. It is **anchored in the historical resurrection of Jesus** and received by faith.

“*Your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” – Colossians 3:3

“*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” – Colossians 1:27

Conclusion: Why Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?

While other worldviews reach upward to transcend, outward to improve, or inward to invent meaning—Christianity declares that the answer has come **down**: Down into history.

Down into flesh.

Down into death and Hades.

And then—**up from the grave, He arose.**

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a metaphor. It is not myth.

It is the **turning point of time and eternity, the meeting place of Heaven and Earth, the dawning of the light of life from the darkness of death and the grave.**

Because He lives:

- Creation has hope.
- Justice has a foundation.
- Suffering has an answer.
- Obedience is born from love.

- And you have a purpose that death cannot destroy.

So hear again the question that echoes through the ages:

“Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?”
He is not here. He is risen.

Look with Peter into the empty tomb—but this time, **marvel with faith**. For this is not a mystery to puzzle over, but a **promise to believe**. Christ’s tomb is empty, and so shall yours be.

For He said,

“I am the resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Job did, which why is confessed:

“I know that my Redeemer lives... and in my flesh I shall see God.” (Job 19:25-27)

Behold your risen Savior, people of God! Marvel, not in doubt, but Marvel in faith.

For the day is coming when you will see Him face to face, with eyes of faith are turned into eyes of flesh made new.

And because on that day you will see Him as He is, **you will be made like Him**—glorious and incorruptible.

So marvel, people of God:
Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Amen.