Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Easter 1C
Peace, Seattle
April 4, 2010 epk
Luke 24:1-12

RESURRECTION LIFE: The New Job Description

The women who trekked to the tomb that Easter morning had accompanied Jesus all the way from Galilee. They'd witnessed his healings, heard his teaching, shared in his ministry, and in his presence they'd been transformed.[1]

No longer SIMPLY mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, they'd become—in his eyes and their own—DISCIPLES, leaving behind what they knew to journey with him to Jerusalem.

But Friday, that journey had come to a screeching halt. They'd watched in terror as it all unfolded, and when it was over, they'd seen his body wrapped and stowed in a newly hewn tomb.

On the third day, in the half-light of dawn, in that graveyard, it might have been tempting to believe that their eyes were playing tricks. But the stone really was rolled away. And the body they'd come to anoint was indeed gone.[2]

The sudden appearance of two men drove them to their knees; and then, this question: WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

Like you and I in the face of this bewildering news, all kinds of scenarios start dancing in their heads. But the possibility of resurrection isn't one of them.

Why are we here, among the dead?!
Because tending a body is what our mothers and grandmothers taught us.
Wrapping up a life's loose ends; bringing the story to closure.
His body wasn't to be the first one—nor would it be the last.

Why seek the dead among the dead? Because death is what we know. It claimed him as it will claim all of us in the end. And there's some comfort—even in that bleak certainty.

I met a man recently who was overwhelmed by life.
Three months back his wife had walked out, leaving him with three young ones to care for.

He told me he'd grown up in West Seattle and attended Madison Jr. High before moving to the south side. He told me he'd been part of Garfield High's championship basketball teams in the mid 70's.

It seemed like the last good thing that'd happened to him, happened over thirty years ago.
He was trying to somehow stay in touch with the glory he once knew, but it wasn't working any more.
The life he knew had become a corpse, and he was at a loss for how to move ahead.

---

[1] According to Luke 8:1-3 these women helped underwrite Jesus' ministry financially.
[2] Joyce Hollyday, *"An Invitation,"* from *"An Invitation to Faith"* in Sojourners. April 1987. Reprinted in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003, p. 381.

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

There's something within us that knows deeply the impulse to care for things that are dead and resists any effort to change. We cling to former visions of ourselves, our roles and relationships, as if they might come back to life if we only held them tightly enough.[3]

I know people like that—if I'm honest, at times I am one.

I know congregations like that too. You ask folks in those communities how it's going and they talk about the days when there were multiple services, overflowing classrooms, and a youth program bursting at the seams. Their life of faith is firmly planted in the past.

We all do that. We hold on to what used to be…

- grasping loved ones and memories too tightly,
- resisting change,
- clinging to what we know in our hearts is dead, because it is safer, more malleable, and more susceptible to burnishing in the private recesses of our memory.[4]

But the question that meets us this Easter morning, as it met the women, is not:
WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE DEAD AMONG THE DEAD, but
WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? Which is another way of saying, GUESS WHAT—YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION JUST CHANGED!

These words from the unworldly messengers at the tomb are a direct challenge:
STOP POKING AROUND GRAVEYARDS! GO LIVE YOUR LIFE!

Arne Strandjord told the story about a friend of his, a rancher, who was out riding his horse one afternoon in the high desert of Eastern Oregon when suddenly his horse reared up and threw him off. [5]

As he landed on the ground, he felt a sharp bite of pain in his rear end and looked around just in time to see a rattlesnake slithering off into the rocks.

Miles away from the nearest phone and farther yet from the nearest clinic, the rancher thought:
THAT'S IT. I'M GOING TO DIE.

He knew that the activity of riding for help would just spread the venom through his body that much faster. So he decided he would sit back, make himself comfortable, and die peacefully.

Leaning himself against a tree he waited.....and waited.....and waited some more.

And after a while he noticed he wasn't feeling that much worse, though there was still a stinging sensation in his rear. Finally, he decided maybe he wasn't going to die after all, and he road on in to the clinic.

Turned out he didn't have a snakebite at all—he'd landed on a cactus!
He still had a good deal of life ahead of him!

---

[3] Nancy Claire Pittman, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 351.
[4] Nancy Claire Pittman, Feast, p. 351
[5] Rev. Arne Strandjord served the church as a pastor in the Northwest until his retirement in 1988. He died in 2000.

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Sometimes we resign ourselves to death. Not usually our physical death but the death of hope, the death of joy, the death of possibility. We get mired down in life's trenches and come to expect less life than what God really wants to give us.

The messengers' question—WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD—is God's way of getting our attention.

"YOU WERE LOOKING FOR THE DEAD AMONG THE DEAD, BUT HE IS NOT HERE AMONG THE DEAD—FOR HE HAS RISEN."

Let's be clear. In and of itself this question, this challenge, wasn't enough to evoke faith in the women who first heard it, and it doesn't evoke faith in us.

It's the next word that does that: REMEMBER!
"REMEMBER HOW HE TOLD YOU WHILE HE WAS STILL IN GALILEE THAT THE SON OF MAN MUST BE HANDED OVER TO SINNERS, AND BE CRUCIFIED, AND ON THE THIRD DAY RISE AGAIN." THEN THEY REMEMBERED HIS WORDS. (Lk 24:6-8)

- **It is this remembrance** of Jesus predicting his own passion that connects the empty tomb in front of them with the very human Jesus who ate and talked, suffered and died.
- **It's through this remembrance that God meets them when there is no way and makes a way.**

The empty tomb isn't enough to birth faith. By itself it only brings perplexity.
Neither evidence from the senses nor intellect are sufficient to grasp the reality of the resurrection.

Jesus himself must teach the community to believe and live in this belief, and that's what he does through the rest of Luke's gospel, as he meets his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and back in Jerusalem once again.

This journey from death to life isn't something we can engineer on our own, any more than we can will ourselves to rise from the grave. It's something we receive, something that comes to us from outside ourselves—yet something that promises to reshape us at the very core of our being when we allow ourselves to be seized by it.

What gets the women—what gets us—back on our feet; what allows us to move out of the graveyard and into a life of hope is the realization that this empty tomb cannot be separated from the words and actions of Jesus.

That resurrection is not some buoyant ideal, focused solely on a heavenly afterlife and disconnected to the real world. It is an invitation to live as Jesus lived, a doorway to a transformed life in which meals are shared with enemies, healing is offered to the hopeless, welcome to the estranged, and prophetic challenges are issued to the powers that be.[6]

No imagined resurrection and no metaphorical one can accomplish that; only a bodily one.
"Make no mistake," writes Updike,
"if He rose at all, it was as His body...
it was not as the flowers, each soft Spring recurrent;

[6] Nancy Claire Pittman, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 353.

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His flesh: ours.
Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door." [7]

And what do we find on the other side, if we walk through that door?
Our job description has changed.

We are no longer embalmers…we are witnesses, we are missionaries.
And it is no longer Jesus alone who shares, heals, welcomes and challenges—it is we ourselves. Equipped by his teaching, empowered by the Holy Spirit, washed in the waters and nourished at the Table, we grab hold of resurrection life and live it now, transformed and transforming.
The job description has changed. And there are no more excuses.

So keep your eyes open, your mind nimble, your hands ready.
Pay attention to the things Christ is doing in you and through you and around you.

Seek no more the living among the dead. For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia.

[7] John Updike, *"Seven Stanzas at Easter,"* from *Telephone Poles and Other Poems.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959. Published in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003, p. 261.