

Draw Near and Experience New Life

Luke 24:1-12

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever wonder what that morning was like?

- Was there a mist in the air? Dew on the grass?
- Was the temperature brisk? You know, the kind of morning when there is just enough of a chill in the air that you need to zip up your jacket just a little bit higher and put your hands in your pockets?
- Maybe there was a light frost on the ground?
- Or maybe it was one of those beautiful spring mornings? The kind of morning that causes my wife to say "It smells like spring today."

I have always pictured it like this:

- The sun has barely started to rise.
- There's just enough light to see where you are going, but not enough to fully light the way.
- It's a clear morning, but the birds aren't even awake yet.

Our text tells us it was ...

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning ... (Luke 24:1)

Whatever the morning was like, I am confident that the night before was restless. The text doesn't say this, but there is no way those women slept well. In fact, they probably had not slept well since last Wednesday.

- Thursday night their friend Jesus had been arrested. He spent the entire night being transferred from courtroom to courtroom as his accusers tried to win a death sentence from someone in authority. Pontius Pilate finally complied.
- By Friday night Jesus was dead, killed in an utterly gruesome manner.
 - Nobody sleeps well when death is freshly in the air.
 - I've been there recently. So have many of you. So you know what I'm talking about.
 - Even if you CAN close your eyes, there's nothing restful about what happens.
- And then last night ... Saturday night ... the only thing on their minds Saturday night was the job that needed to be done.
 - In the rush to get Jesus buried before the start of the Sabbath on Friday evening, there had not been time to appropriately wash the body and anoint it with all the standard burial spices.
 - That needed to get done quickly. It may have already been too late, but it still needed done.

Technically, the rules of their Jewish faith allowed them to tend to the body at the end of the Sabbath, that is, sunset on Saturday night. But it was dark then. Jerusalem was patrolled by Roman soldiers, and it was not safe for a woman to be out on the streets after dark.

- So they had no choice but to wait ... impatiently, I'm sure ... until the sun started to peek over the horizon.
- And it finally did ... very early in the morning.

For you and me, Easter Sunday morning is a day of joy and celebration. Our worship service is filled "Alleluias." Our entire day is booked with family dinners and other Easter traditions that cause us to be happy. We look forward to this day.

- For them, however, it was a morning of sadness and sorrow. They dreaded this day.
- Jesus was dead. No other reality entered their minds. That's why they ...

... took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. (Luke 24:1)

Our theme throughout this Lenten season has been reflected in a simple invitation:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

On this morning ... this first Easter morning ... these women accepted that invitation and went to the tomb, fully expecting one thing but finding another.

They expected to find death but instead found life.

#1: THEY DISCOVERED THAT ALL THE OBSTACLES WERE GONE

When the Gospel of Mark tells this story, it includes a question the women asked each other as they made that early morning journey:

They asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3)

That was a major obstacle. In Biblical times a groove was cut into the ground in front of the entrance to the cave-like tomb. A huge stone, circular like an oversized wagon wheel, was rolled into that groove to close the entrance.

- It was well beyond the strength of these women to roll that stone away.

There was another obstacle in their way. There were soldiers ... like the ones who patrolled the streets during the night ... who had been posted outside the tomb. They were there by order of the Roman governor who had been pressured by the Jewish religious leaders. They were afraid ...

... his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. (Matthew 27:64)

But when they DREW NEAR, the obstacles were gone.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb ... (Luke 24:2)

And there is no mention of the soldiers! They fled the scene when God rolled away that stone. Who can blame them?

When these women DREW NEAR they expected to find death. But they found life instead. And they found that everything that had stood between them and that new life had been fully and completely eliminated on that Easter morning.

#2: THEY DISCOVERED THE PROMISE WAS FULFILLED

The angels who appeared to them that morning greeted them with these words:

He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee. (Luke 24:6)

Dallas Holm has a song in which Jesus triumphantly proclaims:

'Cause I'll rise again
Ain't no power on earth can tie me down
Yes, I'll rise again
Death can't keep me in the ground!

I don't know what the Greek word for "ain't" is. I never learned that one. But no matter how He said, Jesus said it.

... the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day. (Luke 24:7)

But his resurrection was more than just a promise to conquer death. By His resurrection, every person who has ever and who will ever live can experience new life themselves.

Christ Himself said:

The thief (the devil) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

That life to which he refers is eternal life ... a life that starts here and now for all who put their trust in him.

The message of Scripture is clear:

There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

The story of Easter is not a story of gloom and despair, of sadness and death. It is the story of eternal life:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)

The resurrection is the ultimate fulfillment of that promise

APPLICATION

Verse 9 tells us:

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. (Luke 24:9)

They had a story to tell. And they told it.

Theirs is the story of Easter. DRAW NEAR and experience it for yourself.

Amen.