

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 31, 2013
Easter Day**

Luke 24:1-12

The Easter Facts

- 1. Resurrection**
- 2. Redemption**
- 3. Reactions**

Luke 24:1-12 –

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

“Just the facts, ma’am.”

Perhaps some of you have heard that line before. That line was inspired by an old time TV police show called Dragnet. On the show,

Detective Joe Friday would investigate crimes. Often when he was interviewing people about a certain crime, they would get sidetracked on unimportant details. He would have to remind them that he wanted “just the facts.”

On the first Easter Sunday there was much confusion and activity happening. Women were seeing miraculous things. People were perplexed. Followers of Jesus were confused. Others did not believe what was being said. What exactly was happening? As we think about this on Easter Sunday, let’s study the Gospel Reading for Easter Sunday in Luke 24 and find for the facts. What are the Easter facts? We will discover three of them today.

1. Resurrection

We read in Luke 24: “*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen!”*”

What were the facts?

- Women – We hear that a number of women get up on Sunday morning to go to the tomb of Jesus. He had died the previous Friday afternoon.
- Spices – These women had bought and prepared spices to take along with them to finish the work of preparing the body of Jesus for burial. You might remember that when Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus it was late in the day on Friday, the day before the Sabbath. The two men had to hastily prepare Jesus’ body and put it in the tomb, and these women wanted to finish the job more thoroughly.
- Early – We hear that they rose very early, even before the sun had come up.

Time was wasting, after all. In the climate of the Holy Land, decomposition took place very quickly, and burial was often the same day in many cases. The earlier they could go, the better.

- The stone – The Gospel of Mark tells us that they wondered how they would get the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Heavy, flat stones were rolled in a groove to cover the entrance to tombs in their day. However, they arrived and found to their surprise that the stone was already rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. In fact, it appeared that the stone may have been removed from its groove and tipped over!
- No body found – Upon entering the tomb, no body was present.
- Angels – Two angels appeared to the women. Their appearance frightened them! The angels informed them that Jesus was not there because he had risen from the dead. The Gospel of Mark adds the detail that the angels told them to “come and see the place where he lay.”
- Peter – At the end of our reading, we heard that Peter came to the tomb when the women reported all of this. He found things just as they said. The Gospel of John adds the detail that he saw that it had not been a case of grave robbery, for the grave clothes were present where the body should have been, and the napkin for the head was neatly folded.

What is the conclusion that is to be drawn from the facts? **All the details point to one conclusion: Resurrection. A resurrection has occurred!**

More evidence can be examined outside of our Scripture text today:

- Old Testament verses predicted this would happen all along. Psalm 16 says, “*You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*” Isaiah 53

prophesied about the Messiah, “*After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.*”

- It’s also noteworthy that the Gospel writer who is recounting these details to us is a doctor! Luke was a doctor by trade, and certainly knew much about life and death.
- It’s also noteworthy that ALL FOUR GOSPELS record the resurrection of Christ as the climactic event of their book. Despite the fact that they have different writers (humanly speaking) with different audiences and different emphases written in different styles, all four Gospels have the same purpose and high point: Christ the Messiah has risen!

This first conclusion today might seem to be quite simplistic. Is this too obvious? Is it even worth noting? Yes, for a couple of reasons!

The first reason this amazing fact must be emphasized is because of the nature of death. The facts about death are cold and unchangeable. There is a constant ratio of deaths per persons. The ratio is 1:1. Death occurs for all people, for “*the wages of sin is death,*” and we all stand under the judgment of a holy God. We do not deserve to live! Looking at the results of death in our world, those who die stay dead. When we follow the body of a loved one to the cemetery, we don’t expect to meet them three days later greeting us with a cheery “Hello!” In fact, that would startle us quite a bit. **But today we see this amazing fact of a resurrection in the Easter details.**

The second reason this simple fact is well worth noting is because of the teachings about Easter and the resurrection that many churches and other pastors promote in our day and age. Believe it or not, many have jettisoned this teaching of a body actually being resurrected on Easter Day. There are Christians who have even said that even though the disciples said Jesus had risen doesn’t mean that it actually happened. Well-meaning Christians have even

promoted natural (and false) explanations for why the tomb was empty on Easter morning:

- The swoon theory, which promotes the idea that Jesus fainted and regained consciousness after being put in the tomb.
- The idea that the disciples did take the body, but that the actual resurrection is not really the important detail in the Easter story.
- Ideas that Easter means Jesus lives on in our hearts or in the good works of believers.
- The prince of hell has even persuaded professor in liberal Lutheran seminaries today to teach: “Whether the grave of Christ was empty or not is not important. What is important is that the spirit of Jesus Christ is alive in the world today.”

Don’t believe that for a second! Believe the first fact: A resurrection has taken place.

2. Redemption

We learn more from our text today. In vv. 6-8 Luke writes, *“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ⁸ Then they remembered his words.”* We see another important conclusion that we need to draw, because of what Jesus had told his followers before he died. He certainly had predicted his resurrection:

- *Luke 9 – “(Jesus) said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’”*
- *Mark 8 – “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this.”*

- *Mark 9 – “He said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.’ ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.”*

Even more important are the times when Jesus spoke about why he would die and rise again:

- *“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10)*
- *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life. ¹⁶ 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)*

Jesus had predicted this because it was his mission to come and give his life for the sin of the world and then to rise again victoriously.

We call this mission of buying us back from sin and Satan our redemption. This is the second fact that we can rejoice in this Easter morning!

The Scriptures point to this Easter fact as the basic reason the Messiah would come into the world:

- The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 4: *“(Jesus our Lord) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*
- Isaiah 53 – *“It was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”*
- And in the great resurrection chapter of the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15, *“If Christ is not raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”*

Jesus completed his mission of paying for the world's sin on the cross, and therefore he was raised by his heavenly Father victoriously. Today is God's stamp of approval on Christ's sacrifice for your sin and mine!

There's an old saying that "things are going according to plan." If you're doing a complicated job or even just enjoying a week of vacation events, you might use that phrase to describe how things are going. "Things are going according to plan" means all is going well. Many people that first Easter day would have said that things were not going according to plan, including the women, the disciples, and Peter himself. But were they? Were things going according to plan? Perfectly, according to God's perspective, for the work of redemption had been accomplished and it was time for his Son to be resurrected!

This is a vital fact for us to note this morning. It shapes our entire view of Easter Day. How does the world view the meaning and purpose of Easter Day? Many traditions (which don't have to be sinful and wrong) can sometimes take the spotlight away from what we've just discovered. Many people can be tempted to feel that this is a day mainly for:

- Plastic green grass with jellybeans stashed in it
- Buying a new tie splashed with pink or a new dress
- Bunnies that lay eggs
- Candy galore, including those yellow marshmallow ones
- Family dinner with ham and miniature pickles

Even worse, many in our world around us view Easter as a "spring thing":

- That this holiday means its time to mow the lawn and spread some Weed 'n Feed
- That Easter weekend means it's time to wash the car and get it in shape
- That there's golf on TV to be watched

If that's the focus of Easter, it is not in harmony with the second fact of Easter that we have seen: Redemption. Easter has everything to do with the cemetery on the hill that you drive by on your way to work. That cemetery is

not the end of all the people buried there. Come Judgment Day all those bodies will be raised to life. Easter means that those people who died in faith in their risen Savior will rise to come home to heaven. Those who died in self-righteousness and unbelief will rise to be plunged into the lake of fire in hell where there will be eternal pain, regret, and hopelessness. **Believers in Christ have nothing to fear from that day, for Jesus has redeemed them and will take them home to be with him forever.**

3. Reactions

We have one more fact to discover this morning. We have seen the clear facts of resurrection and redemption so far. The final fact we can take note of is reaction to the Easter message. We read, "*When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.*"¹⁰ *It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.*"¹¹ *But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*"¹² *Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."*

It would have been interesting to have a camera on the faces of the people involved in that first Easter morning. What looks on faces would we have seen, if that were possible?

What kinds of looks and reactions would we see on the women's faces? We hear that they were "perplexed" at what was happening. Literally, the Greek word means that their thoughts were at a dead end, or they were "at wit's end." Then they were terrified at the sight of the angels. Then they reacted in some way to the message that the angels told them.

What kinds of looks would we have seen on the disciples' faces when the women told them what they had seen and heard? We hear that the disciples thought that these women were speaking nonsense. They did not believe them.

What kind of looks would Peter's face have displayed that day? He took the opportunity to run out to the tomb. What kind of feelings did he have? What was the look on his face like?

And what was it like when he looked around in that tomb? It says he went away “wondering what had happened,” that is in the sense of wonder and amazement, not understanding what was going on. **We see many different reactions on that first Easter Day.**

As we contemplate those reactions, what can we learn? First of all, let’s consider our own reactions. We certainly must pray that we receive our risen Savior with a heart of faith today, a Spirit-worked faith that believes in the risen Savior who has died for us to redeem us, and who rose again.

Secondly, we must realize that various reactions will continue to take place around us. What will happen when we tell those we know and meet about the meaning of Easter and the risen Lord? After all, you are witnesses of what you have seen and heard. How will people react? Will there be those who are perplexed? Will there be those who believe you are speaking nonsense? Will there be those who refuse to believe? Will there be those who are amazed, yet not understanding? The more people you share your faith and life with, the more reactions like these you will see. But don’t be discouraged. Don’t forget that the Holy Spirit will also work a reaction of faith in some. Don’t be surprised at that, for the Easter miracle of faith will continue to happen in hearts until the end of time!

Just the facts! What Easter facts we have seen in Scripture this morning?

- 1. Resurrection**
- 2. Redemption**
- 3. Reactions**

Just the facts, ma’am! As we consider the facts this morning, don’t view this as a trial or an investigation. This is no cold exercise of some fact-finding mission today. This is a joyful exercise of faith. This is a message that gives us the sure hope of heaven and eternal life. May this joyful message fill our hearts today. For he has risen, just as he said. Hallelujah! And Amen!