**Luke 24:1-12**

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. **2** And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. **5** And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6** He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7**  that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” **8** And they remembered his words, **9** and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. **10** Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, **11** but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. **12** But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

**“The Place Of The Tomb, A Surprise?**

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia! Grace and peace to you in the Name of Jesus Christ, “…for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Amen. Easter is all about the surprise of life. We should be more shocked about what Easter means to our western world. Do you enjoy how hospitals promote healing? Christians denied a mentality for survival of the fittest to care with life for the sick and injured. Does you value the dignity given to human beings? Christians never saw validity of a person being based on “choice,” but cherished life in fullness regardless of age. Have you seen a cemetery? Christians rejected views about death having the last say using the name cemetery, which means, “sleeping place.”

Our western world surprisingly is an inheritance of life. Christians brought this witness and sacrifice to put life at the center rather than death. However, none of it prevailed on its own because the source did not reside in men. It goes back to Easter with an empty tomb and risen Savior. If life is failing in our western world, the problem rests with faith in the living God for sinners. On Good Friday, everybody knew that the death sentence read, “Jesus Christ defeated” and the tomb sealed it. Yet, everybody on Easter Sunday knew the message stated, “Jesus Christ wins.” The stone and the tomb with no body present proved this wondrous fact. Those denying Jesus’ resurrection, like the religious leader and soldiers, had to lie for their own self-interests. We need not entertain the same lie in our western world because God is faithful. The surprise at the tomb is the triumph of Christ as the victor of life who shares His victory with us.

Of course, the miraculous victory of Easter was a surprise, especially to followers of Jesus. They had felt the grief and hopelessness that was no “TGIF” for them. If Jesus’ death already did in His disciples, their reaction to the resurrection did more than catch them by surprise. The first to face what this meant were women who came most prepared to the tomb. They loved Jesus and their early morning hike after the Sabbath along with the spices for burial showed it. Maybe the Roman soldiers would be kind enough to roll away the stone for them. Maybe the stench and decaying body of Jesus would be bearable enough to handle. However, what they found at the tomb were no guards, the tomb entrance open, and the body of Jesus gone. St. Luke tells us their blunt reaction, “They were perplexed…” Having started their recovery over the cross they were now stunned with surprise once again.

Even more surprising than these facts had to be the two messengers or angels. An answer came from God about the puzzle these women could not put together. They said, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” This was no chastisement, but an announcement of victory. It was a surprise greater than what the shepherds had heard about the birth of God’s Son. Jesus born was one thing, but Jesus lives? His death was not the last say? What surprised these women became only more surprising to the apostles. They were not jumping around elated over Jesus’ resurrection at first. The whole ordeal told to them was denied outright. St. Luke tells us the women’s words were labeled an, “idle tale.” The men treated it like a fantasy or just plain nonsense. This surprise was just too much for them.

Jesus rising from the dead took everyone by surprise. None of the Gospel accounts hides this fact. Yet, nobody should have been surprised over what had happened. King Solomon knew why life abounded in Israel saying, “Every word of God proves true…” (Proverbs 30:5). Jesus is the Word become flesh. He told His disciples the truth in full. The angels were almost surprised over how the women forgot this fact. So they pointed them back to Jesus being God stating, “Remember how he told you…” More than once, Jesus spoke about how He would suffer and die only to rise again. This was simply two sides of the same coin concerning God’s plan for salvation. The living was not among the dead, because Christ was the living One. He said, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:18). Should there have been surprise at the tomb? The resurrection only confirms how God dealt with sin, death and the Devil already by the cross of Christ.

Since angels came with good news on Easter morning, it means a surprise bigger than what meets the eye. This victory of life in Christ has become the greatest surprise to the domain of darkness. Good Friday was hell on earth, all darkness had its way with Christ, and Satan figured he finally secured his kingdom for all time. Death was the weapon of the Devil and He used it well against the life of Christ. The way things looked had no hope, no peace, no freedom, and no more Jesus. Yet, the best way to defeat such a ruthless enemy was to take the weapon of death out of the Devil’s hands. Christ the victim actually achieved the victory while darkness was blinded by its own glory. His death was the glory that took death into His hands. Alive again, Jesus now reigns as the authority of life who has no end.

Easter is not about the strength, will, and work of humanity. Against the powers of darkness arises Christ full of life by His Name. As the baptized confess in the creed, “And He descended into hell.” God has struck at the very heart of darkness dispelling its power and authority. Let none remain with sadness over sin for Christ has paid the penalty for you. Let none fear death for hope is in Christ who has reached into the grave. Let none despair over the darkness for Christ shined His victory in hell itself. Christ has built His church on the good confession that rests in Him promising, “…the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). From the struggle against Satan, Christ arises triumphant. Even heaven sees how His victory has angered hell, troubled the demons, and made death obedient to Him.

God’s victory is a surprise of life that He shares with us by faith in Jesus. No miracle, not even the resurrection, can make a person believe in Jesus and the salvation God gives. The angels extended this as a gift at the tomb from Christ and the women remembered what He said. To join in this conquest out of the cross, means for us still to listen to Christ alone. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Death no longer gets the last say in this world. Neither does sin rule us like slaves because Christ has joined us to be free by His sacrifice.

Like the celebration of Easter, so the Word and Sacrament surprise us. Christ’s triumph still goes out disarming death and paralyzing the Devil. What seems perplexing about these mysteries Christ has made plain by His Word. They are not signs like an empty tomb, but the risen Christ at work bestowing His victory. Easter gave a basis and definition of life that changed our western world. God grant us to see not only these fruitful benefits for today, but to believe in His faithfulness that has no end. Jesus brings the victory and is, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep…” This good news is for all, but the best surprise God gives it to you. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Amen. The peace of the risen and glorious Savior and Lord that no darkness can overcome be with you always. Amen.