

## Easter C 2025 Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! So, we can stop looking for the living among the dead.

Jesus tried on numerous occasions to explain to his followers that although he would die, he would rise again, but they did not understand. We can't blame them; imagine if we had not lived our entire lives celebrating Easter and hearing about Jesus' resurrection. You wouldn't even need to be in church: just drive through town—even the sign at the pizza place says *He is Risen*. But the women and Jesus' other disciples did not understand resurrection, yet. They understood death: death from disease, injury, childbirth, or old age; death from war and the violent government that occupied their land. They understood Jesus' crucifixion—which was not just an expedient way to execute people but a tool of Roman propaganda, a way to claim so-called “peace” through force. Like other forms of state execution, historical and modern—be it burning at the stake, hanging, electric chair, concentration camp—the brutality of the cross was not only meant to shame and erase the crucified but also to terrorize everyone else into submission. To achieve that end, the empire didn't particularly care whether the person they were killing was guilty; Pilate admitted that Jesus was innocent. This hopeless world of deadly injustice was all that the women had ever known.

So they do not approach the tomb anticipating resurrection. They go to embalm the body of their dead friend and teacher, an act of love *and* of defiance—a way of saying that they would not forget Jesus or the movement that Rome tried to dismember through his crucifixion. They were perplexed to find the tomb empty, to not even be able to memorialize Jesus through the tender act of anointing. But the dazzling heavenly messengers want the women to remember Jesus not by his broken body but by his words: *Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over, crucified, and on the third day rise again.* Jesus had predicted his death, yes, but also his life. Then the women do remember, and they return to the other disciples to tell them what they witnessed—the empty tomb where Jesus' body should have been and the messengers' announcement that he had risen, just as he said he would. *But these words seemed to the disciples an idle tale, and they did not believe the women.*

That's the nice translation: the women's words seemed like hogwash, garbage, foolish nonsense. And from a logical, empirical point of view, we can see why those outside the faith think Christians are foolish for believing in the resurrection. We celebrate Easter while still living every day in a world of injustice, violence, and death; the triumph of the risen Christ over the evil that killed him sounds like a fairytale. But believing in the resurrection is less an act of foolish naiveté than it is an act of passionate resistance, a bold claim that truth will not be silenced, hate will not kill love, evil will not defeat decency, even death will not overpower life.

Math is not my favorite way of understanding the world, so it was another pastor who figured out that when Peter ran alone to the empty tomb, it meant only 9% of Jesus' closest and most thoroughly informed disciples believed the first proclamation of his resurrection. I would be surprised if 9% of earth's 8 billion residents today are confident that truth will persist, love will endure, and justice will prevail over the myriad evils that still exist in our world; I know some days I struggle to be part of that minority of hope. When we claim that following the way of Jesus leads us out of death and into new life, it will seem, to many, maybe even to most, maybe some days even to ourselves, as if we are clinging to an idle tale. We are so certain of death because we see so much of it, and it seems impossible that life could overcome it. But what the disciples at first dismissed as an idle tale turned out to be the truth that changed the world—as only resurrection could.

All throughout the Easter season, we celebrate resurrection—the new of life of Christ which means new life for us. We take hold of God's promise of deeper love and greater power than what we have seen so far. If for this life only we have hoped, we *are* most to be pitied, because the values of this world, the methods and systems and rulers of this world so often lead us not to abundant life but to fear, death, and despair. But Jesus showed us a different way, and try as this world might, it could not defeat him, not even by the cross. May we stop looking for the living among the dead and trust in the one who calls us out of death and into new life. Let us defy the powers that would lead us to death, let us defy even death itself each time we proclaim our hope in what the world says is impossible: he is not dead, he is risen. Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia.