You expect highways to be jammed during rush hour. You expect to find hamburgers at McDonalds. You expect spring to follow winter. You came to church this morning expecting to smell the fragrance of flowers. And you do. You expected to hear some loud, special music. And you have. You expected to hear a preacher preach this morning. So I am. You expect all these things. No surprises here.

But there are also those times when things are not what you would expect. The time when you blew right through rush hour without having to tap your brakes. The time when you were fishing for blue gills and landed a trophy walleye instead. You expected that it would be just another church service. Suddenly, a single sentence from a sermon or the turn of phrase from a hymn verse hit out of nowhere and your eyes began to tear up.

Easter is one of those things we just were not expecting, but it is exactly what we need! My Easter encouragement to you this morning is that you pull up a pew for a few moments. Don't worry, your Easter hams are going to be OK. Your company will wait. For a just a few moments, let's turn away from the business of everyday life and turn toward the ancient message of Easter. Together, **LET'S TURN TO JESUS FOR RESURRECTION AND LIFE!**

Luke’s account of Easter morning begins with exactly what you would expect: **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.** It all seems so very normal, so unexceptional. All we read about here are dear friends, a dreadful grave, and basic human dignity.

These women had been dear friends and supporters of Jesus and his ministry. Some may have been mothers of some of Jesus’ disciples. They supplied food and clothes for Jesus with their own money. They stood by Jesus at the foot of the cross when so many others had deserted him. Their loyalty and their love for Jesus were on display in their lives. They would demonstrate their loyalty and love also in his death.

Where were these faithful women going? They were going to a dreadful tomb. No one likes cemeteries. We will do anything we can to nice-ify them while we are there. We talk about how pretty the flowers are, how nicely mown the grass is, and how beautiful the memorial stones are. But deep down we know that we cannot spruce up death with pretty flowers and a well-manicured lawn. Jesus’ tomb was a brand-new one - loaned to him by a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea. But even Joseph’s Cadillac tomb could not compensate for the fact that Jesus’ battered, lifeless body lay inside on a cold stone slab. What a dreadful end Jesus had endured. What a dreadful place to see him in.

These faithful women would make the best of it. They would go to that dreadful tomb and supply Jesus with some basic human dignity. Jesus had received a quick burial on Good Friday. On Saturday evening, after the Sabbath day rest was over, the women went shopping for burial spices - myrrh and aloes. They would lovingly clean Jesus’ bloody body, gently sprinkle his body with the spices, snuggly wrap his body with clean linen, tenderly place a burial cloth on his face, and let Jesus rest in peace. Then they would return to a life that was going to be dreadfully different without Jesus!

All of this is completely what we would expect. Nothing out of the ordinary here. A dead man, a grave, and a group of mourners wanting to say a final, fitting farewell. If Luke ended his account here, we would have no reason to celebrate Easter. This morning would be a huge waste of time. If the account ended here, then our dreams for heaven would be dashed and we would have just come face-to-face with the death of the Christian faith!

But then something happened that the women did not expect: **They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.** They returned to the tomb at the crack of dawn. When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Who could possibly have beaten them out here this early? And besides, who would have opened the grave? What about the...
Roman guards? They had been keeping watch to make sure that none of Jesus’ disciples came in the middle of the night, carted off the body, and then claimed that Jesus was alive. Where were they? Roman guards were tough. They did not run away from their duty, even if it meant death for them. What was going on here!?

The women stepped into the tomb. When they did, they experienced the first Easter:

*When they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 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? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.*

Instead of linen grave clothes, they saw two angels dressed in dazzling light! Instead of a cold cadaver, they saw angelic messengers. The rocky slab where Jesus’ lifeless body lay became the first Easter pulpit. Instead of the silence of a tomb and the stillness of death, they listened to a sermon - short, sweet, and to the point. This sermon has literally changed the history of the world: **He is not here; he has risen!** The beaten and battered, whipped and crucified One lives again!

**Just a second, Pastor. Did you say that a dead man literally rose from the dead?**

Actually, I did not say it. Angels said it. No, even more than that, Jesus himself said it! **Remember how he told you!** the angels said. Whether you believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead does not change the fact in the least: Easter truly, literally happened. Turn away from doubts and disbelief! Instead, turn in joy to Jesus who is the resurrection and the life!

But let me play the devil’s advocate for a moment. Let’s say Jesus did not rise from the dead. Let’s say the Roman guards were all chicken, the women were all delusional, and the angels were purely mythical. Let’s go all the way and say that Luke was just making stuff up. What are you left with?

1. You are left with your SIN. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.** If Jesus has not been raised, then when Jesus said, **It is finished** on the cross - he was not talking about our salvation. No, he would have been finished. A dead Savior is a dead deception, a buried dream. No, if Jesus is still dead, then we have a huge problem that is three letters long: S-I-N! And deep down inside of us, every single one of us knows that the wages of sin is death.

2. If Jesus is still dead, then we have no real hope when we take our own trip to the funeral home one day! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: **If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.** If Christ has not been raised, then the funeral home is a hopeless - pardon the pun - dead end. Then too there is always that nagging knowledge found in my conscience and in my Bible - something about hell. If Christ has not been raised, then the thought of eternity can only make us shudder!

3. Finally, if Christ is still dead - then we have no real hope in this life either. Paul says: **If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** If Jesus is still in his grave - then this sermon is silliness, your trust in Christ is childish, and your faith is foolish. If Christ has not been raised, then you might as well go home and play a good game of Trivial Pursuit, because that is what your life is if Christ is dead.

But Jesus has been raised from the dead - really, physically, truly raised from the dead! The crucified one lives again! God stakes his entire reputation upon these historical, unshakeable Easter facts! Luke is no liar. The women were not delusional - far from it. They
were astonished! The angels are no myth. They are the Almighty’s messengers - proclaiming the greatest truth of all time. God proclaims his Easter truth to us so that we can have a rock-solid foundation to build our life upon: that sin, through Christ, stands forgiven; that death, in Christ, has gone to die; that the devil, by Christ, has been defeated; that life, in Christ, lasts forever! Easter is exactly what we would not expect, but it is exactly what we need!

What do you need? You desperately need God’s forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross to pay sin’s shocking price tag. On the cross, Jesus said that his work of saving us from our sins was finished. Easter is the proof that Jesus’ work really works for us! The Scriptures tell us: He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Easter is our Lord’s declaration to us that our sin has been forgiven. Turn to Jesus for his forgiveness! He died and rose again to forgive every sin for every sinner.

What do you need? You need help with death! In Christ, death has been defeated. The funeral parlor looks like a dismal place. A graveside feels so final. But looks and feelings can be deceiving. Death and the grave is not our grand finale. Because Jesus lives again, we can be absolutely sure that death is but a sleep. My alarm clock wakes me up in the morning and so does yours. Our living Lord will one day wake us up from our graves, just as he himself did. In Jesus - the resurrection and life - we live even though we die. Turn to Jesus! His resurrection ensures your resurrection!

What do you need? You need hope in life. Wars drag on. The economy is not exactly robust. We pray about our problems when we go to sleep. When we wake up, they are often still there. There are plenty of times when it feels as if God is floating somewhere out there beyond Pluto, while our problems feel as close as the nose on our face. Your hope for daily life and eternal life is not placed in a dead guy. No! Christ is alive, which means that we have all kinds of hope to bring us through this life. The living Lord is with you every single second of this life until he takes you into eternal life. Turn to Jesus! His life is your life!

So what are you expecting to receive from your celebration of Easter? I suppose that depends on what you personally believe about the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. If the forgiveness of sins and victory over death are not really that big of a deal to you, then there is no pressing reason to come and worship him again anytime soon. And the best you can hope for today is a bunny, bonnets, a ham, and a nap. But if Christ walked out of his tomb - truly, bodily, powerfully - then you have every reason to worship him as often as we can! And the best you can hope for today is full forgiveness for all of your sins, complete removal of all your guilt, God’s truth to drive out your doubts, joy as you live for Jesus now, hope of eternal life in heaven, and the assurance of your own bodily resurrection when the last trumpet sounds.

Until that last trumpet sounds, may our Lord Jesus keep you in a living Easter faith - a faith that continually turns to Jesus for resurrection and life. Turn to Jesus, always Jesus, only Jesus. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!

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