Have you ever had trouble finding someone’s house? You drive around and keep looking at your directions or your GPS and street signs, and you just cannot find it. You get more and more frustrated. Then you spot someone walking along the road and ask the person: **Can you tell me where so and so lives? The house is supposed to be right around here somewhere!** The person on the side of the road looks around. All he can see in any direction are tombstones. He does not know what to say because you’re looking for the living among the dead.

Do you think you could ever be that lost? Probably not. This morning, in God’s Word, we see a group of women looking for Jesus in a cemetery and an angel asking them: **Why do you look for the living among the dead?**

Of course, you know the story. These women were not stupid or confused. They went to the last place anyone had seen Jesus: the tomb where Jesus was buried just before sundown on Friday. When we hear the angel’s question, **Why do you look for the living among the dead?**, the natural answer is **Where else would he be?**

These women had gotten up early that morning because in love they wanted to give Jesus’ body a proper burial. On the way there, they talked about getting into a tomb that was sealed by a large stone. But when they got there, nothing was the way they thought it would be. The Roman guards Pilate had posted were gone. The stone was rolled away and inside they found grave clothes, but no body. That is when angel said: **Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!**

Don’t those words sound like a rebuke? The angel thought these women should have known better than to come to the tomb looking for a dead Jesus. They should have known he would be alive on Easter morning. Jesus had prepared them for this moment. Again and again, he had told his disciples that he was going to die and then rise, but they never understood what he was talking about. The angel was asking these women why they did not understand what Jesus had promised.

We might be more sympathetic to these women than the angels were. Angels are holy who see God all the time. They do not know what it is like to be wrong, to be weak in faith or to misunderstand God. But we are sinners. We have been wrong so many times about so many things, especially spiritual things, that we can understand why these women never grasped the promise Jesus made. After all, who comes back from the dead? People died all the time then. These women had probably done this kind of duty before for people who were close to them. Never had any of those bodies been living again three days after they died. It seems unfair to us to rebuke these women for having the natural reaction in a situation like this.

They should have known better. Just weeks before, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus had raised other people too. These women knew that. They may have wondered: **But who was going to raise Jesus?** But the point of those miracles was to show that Jesus had power over life and death. The angels reminded them: **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.** They should have trusted his promise and come to the tomb in hope, but sin and doubt ruled their minds, and they reached the tomb thinking Jesus was dead.

The angels rebuked these women because the angels were holy who had the same perspective God has. We can make all the excuses in the world for these women, but that will not change the fact that their faith was not strong enough to cling to God’s promises at
this horrible moment in their lives. Why would we want to defend their sinful weakness?

Sadly, it is because we identify with these humble women who loved their Lord. Our faith is often weak too. When we hurt, when life seems impossible, when death is looking us in the face - our own death or someone we love - our natural response is simply to try to cope. We tell ourselves that death is just a part of life. The natural response is for us to wrap ourselves in sorrow and just focus on the practical needs at hand. We can easily leave Jesus and his promises out of the picture.

But that is no different than what these women did when they looked for their Lord in a tomb. The angels owe us the same rebuke. But remember what they also said: **He is not here; he has risen!** In his great love, Jesus did the impossible. He died on the cross and paid for our sin and then rose from the dead. Now death does not win in our lives. All those who die trusting in Jesus will live with him forever - even if their faith is weak like it was for these women on that first Easter morning. Day by day, the power of the resurrection - the gospel - is a living force that changes our hearts. It is the source of strength for our faith, especially on the days when life hurts and death comes.

What difference does it make if you look for a name on a mailbox or a tombstone? You can probably find most names in both places, but you can only visit a friend in one of those places. That is the point the angels were making. **Why do you look for the living among the dead?**

And that makes all the difference in the world! Too often, when our faith is weak, when we are dissatisfied, when we feel guilty and foolish and unproductive, we look for Jesus in all the wrong places. But the place to find Jesus is in the gospel. We find him in the Word that is preached and taught to us. We find him in our Bibles. We find him in our baptisms, which washed our sins away, and in Communion, where we receive the actual body and blood of the Lord. But that is not the natural place for sinners to look for him. We want to find him in our own hearts, in our feelings. We feel a need to hear him speak to us in all the little miracles that happen to us day after day.

That is not where the angel told these women to look. He told them to remember what Jesus had said to them. He told them to remember the gospel: Jesus died and rose for them. He says the same thing to us. My friends, our hearts are corrupt, full of sin and false ideas. If we go looking for the Son of God there, if we imagine that the Holy Spirit will speak to us in our lives and in our hopes and in being true to ourselves, we are looking for the living among the dead. The great irony of the resurrection is that Jesus is not found where people expect him to be. Instead, he is found right where he said he'd be: in the gospel. And it is only the hardness of our sinful hearts that wants him to be someplace else.

The angels at the tomb knew that. So they repeated the message Jesus had been telling his disciples all along: **The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.** If the women and the disciples had understood that message, the weekend of Good Friday through Easter Sunday might have been easier for them to bear, but they did not understand. They were sinners, just like we are.

So when Jesus was crucified, their hearts were broken and they could find no comfort. All they could do was carry on with the tasks at hand - like preparing his body for burial. Jesus' words were still the power of God, but his followers did not understand them because they wanted Jesus to be something different than what he was. They did not want to see him as a man who came here to die.

But that is exactly why Jesus came! He came to die, because our hearts are sinful,
because we look for Jesus in all the foolish places our sinful hearts tell us to, because God has to drag us, kicking and screaming, as it were, to his Word and sacraments. Jesus died because our faith is weak. He died because all sinful hearts deserve to die and spend eternity in hell. When he died, he paid for every sinful heart - including ours.

On Easter Sunday, Jesus rose! His resurrection is God’s proof that Jesus did all that he came to do. Jesus’ resurrection says that he has paid for every sin of every sinner who has ever lived and ever will live. He has paid for your sins and mine. It is God’s promise that we don’t have any sin left to pay for. Our accounts are now clear. Our record is now clean. That will always be true for us. God calls us perfect because Jesus rose. And God promised in his resurrection that we will rise too. Death cannot hold us anymore. God has crippled death. When Jesus returns, God will kill death and we will live with him forever.

That is what the angel meant when he said: Remember what he told you. Luke says: Then they remembered his words. Suddenly, it all came flooding back to them. With this simple expression, Luke shows the power of the Holy Spirit to create, strengthen, and clarify faith.

And what did they remember? They remembered the gospel, the promise of everlasting life. That is where the power is, and when these women heard it, they believed. Now, they still needed to grow in their faith. There was so much more to learn. They still had years to live on this earth. They would still have to die themselves. God was just beginning a process of maturing their faith to face life and death. When they remembered Jesus’ promise and began to understand that he had kept it, they began to trust in all God’s promises.

Jesus’ return to life brings us back to life. We do not want to look for him among the dead, but he did have to look for us in a spiritual graveyard. Our hearts were dead in trespasses and sins, but his resurrection is more powerful than sin or death. It creates new life. It changes who and what we are. On our own, we would only look for Jesus in the wrong places. So he came to us. We have him every time we come to Communion and every time we remember the gift he gave us in Baptism. We have him every time we hear the gospel.

And we still have room to grow. All long as we are alive, we will need to grow in our faith and our understanding. The tool God has given us when we are hurting is the gospel. It is the power of God. Jesus rose. That makes all the difference in this world, because now we will live with him forever.

Today, we celebrate the fact that Jesus’ tomb was empty. The women heard the greatest proclamation of all time: He is not here. He has risen just as he said he would. Jesus kept his promise. We do not have to go to a cemetery to find him. We do not need to tend his grave. He is alive. Because he is alive, God promises us that all our sins are wiped out and forgotten. Because he is alive, God promises us that we will live with him forever. Because he is alive, we have a new life already here - our life of faith in him. Enjoy that life now and look forward to eternal life with him! Amen.

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