A few years ago, news came out that they had found Jesus’ tomb. Actually they found his ossuary. An ossuary is a chest, a box, kind of like a coffin. And inside the box they discovered human remains. There was even a documentary that aired on the Discovery Channel called *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*. The film suggests that a 1980 archaeological discovery uncovered the final resting place of several prominent New Testament figures, including Jesus himself.

If proven, this claim would have devastating consequences for the Christian faith. The apostle Paul admitted as much when he told the Christians at Corinth: **If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**

If Jesus’ dead body has been found, then what are we doing here today? Why don’t we go home and go back to bed? Why haven’t churches canceled their Easter services? Why haven’t we put up a *For Sale* in front of the church?

Well, there is no need for us to close our doors because there is strong evidence that contradicts this potentially faith destroying claim. Some experts are not convinced that the name chiseled on the box that allegedly contains Jesus’ remains even says Jesus at all.

Just because some of the other ossuaries that were found were inscribed with names like James and Mary does not necessarily mean that those were the graves of THE James or one of THE Marys from the Bible. Keep in mind one historian says that one out of every four women at the time was named Mary.

This is just some of the evidence that disputes those controversial. But the most compelling evidence of all is eye witness testimony. We do not have to rely on the so-called experts because we can listen to someone who was actually there.

The angel was at the tomb. The angel went inside Jesus’ tomb. And this is what he reported to the first people who came to the tomb on that first Easter: **He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.**

We do not need to wonder if Jesus’ earthly remains are in some recently discovered bone box. We do not have to be worried that Jesus’ body is lying in some not-yet-discovered tomb outside of Jerusalem. We know that Jesus is alive. We know that the tomb is empty, and because **THE TOMB IS EMPTY, OUR HEARTS ARE FULL.**

Our hearts are filled with joy today because Jesus has fulfilled all of God’s promises. The Lord allowed men of God like Moses and Micah and Isaiah to prophesy about the promised Messiah, to proclaim who he would be and what he would do.

And then he came. From his lowly birth in Bethlehem to his holy death in Jerusalem, Jesus fulfilled everything that had been written about him in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. And because he did, our hearts are full.

Our hearts are filled with awe today because Jesus lived a perfect life in
our place. For 33 years, Jesus endured the attacks of Satan and the assaults of the world. And he did not sin, not even once, not a single white lie, not a single dark thought. Jesus resisted every temptation. Jesus passed every test. And because he did, our hearts are full.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude today because Jesus died in our place. He did not deserve to die, but he did. He died a painful, shameful death on the cross for us. Jesus willingly gave up his life because he knew that it was the only way to save our souls from eternal death. And because he did, our hearts are full.

Our hearts are filled with hope today because Jesus has risen from the dead. This is what Easter is all about. This is the reason we are here so early in the morning. The devil has been defeated. Death has lost its sting. Sin is forgiven. Jesus is alive! And because he is, our hearts are full.

Our hearts are filled with peace today because our living Lord is very much involved in our lives. He will never leave us or forsake us. He will be with us until the end of time. He makes all things in this world work out for our good. He protects us from harm and danger. He feeds us with Word and Sacrament. And because he continues to do all of these things, our hearts are full.

Our hearts are filled with anticipation today because Jesus’ resurrection guarantees that death is not our final destination. On the Last Day, Jesus will come back in glory. On the Last Day, Jesus will come to judge the world. He will raise up all the saints who have gone before us. He will take us to be with him and them in heaven. And because he will, our hearts are full.

This is the Easter gospel. This is the message that is imprinted on our hearts. This is the message that we cherish in our hearts. This message is so special, so wonderful that it spills out of our hearts and onto our lips: Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill