

March 27, 2016  
Luke 24:1-12  
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### **“Not Here”**

**Good morning, and happy Easter! We’ve already done a lot of celebrating: praying, singing, and eating -- this is the high feast day of our faith; I wish that joy for each one of you.**

**This brightness is quite a contrast to the mood of the past few days, at least in terms of the biblical story. The challenge of Holy Week is that biblical narrative starts on a frightening track and picks up speed beginning on Thursday, the day Jesus had a Last Supper with his disciples and washed their feet, and told them how his body and blood would be broken and shared as a covenant with them. Jesus knew that one of those disciples would betray him and the others would abandon him; that betrayal had to be part of the anguish that haunted his prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. Things start to careen around as Jesus is arrested by Roman soldiers, taken before the Jewish council, tried by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, sent off to Herod, the Jewish prelate, accused, mocked sent back to Pilate, condemned, beaten and crucified between two criminals. By three in the afternoon on Friday, the roller coaster ride of betrayal, arrest, beating, humiliation and torture screeches to an abrupt halt. The ride is over. Jesus is dead.**

**Jesus’ body is taken down and hurriedly moved to a tomb before sunset on Friday, so as not to interfere with the Jewish Sabbath. And from sunset Friday to dawn on Sunday, nothing happens. Nothing. No Easter Egg hunts, no grocery shopping, no sermon writing no chancel decorating no church cleaning. After all that terrible heart-wrenching and soul-shattering frenzy of the past 48 hours, Everything. Just. Stops.**

And that's where we are on Sunday morning; Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James at the first light of dawn, on their way to the tomb. They saw the crucifixion, they knew Jesus was dead. They couldn't touch a dead body on the Sabbath, but they could go now and anoint the body to slow the decomposition. It was a way to pay their last respects; it was the right thing to do. Nobody was expecting anything to *happen*.

But something *does* happen -- or rather, things *don't* happen which were supposed to. There's something off kilter at the tomb: it wasn't sealed up like it should have been, and Jesus' body isn't there. And then something significant happens: two men in dazzling white tell the women that Jesus is not here; he has risen. We have to be careful not to be so dazzled by these men in white that we miss what is truly significant here: the women are told that Jesus has risen, but they don't actually see him, because Jesus is not there. In this sense, too, we are like the women at the tomb. We have been told that Christ is risen, but we haven't seen it for ourselves. Why did the women believe such a thing? Why should we ?

Luke tells us that the women 'remembered his words,' the words of Jesus. It was the memory of those words which transformed the women from skeptics to witnesses. They returned from the tomb to give witness to the resurrection: they were eye witness to the absence of Jesus. He is not in the tomb; the body they were expecting to see is not here. He's alive, he has risen! It must have been an exciting moment for those women.

It was a non-starter for the disciples and those who were with them. Luke says, "but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." And here's why resurrection is such a hard sell, and so likely to be dismissed as an idle tale: resurrection demands that we believe in what is not there. Instead of solid, physical, tangible proof, we're expected to believe because of what we can't see, what is not in the empty tomb, what is not wrapped in the death shroud. Is it any wonder that the women's story was dismissed as an idle tale? Of all the disciples, it is only Peter in this account who has enough curiosity to go to the tomb and see for himself what is not there. And when Peter sees the empty linen cloths, even without the testimony of the angels, he believes.

**Believing in things we cannot see is difficult. In some circles believing in what others cannot see might be called have hallucinations, or having delusions. The book of Hebrews has another word for it. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” We believe in the absence of Jesus from the tomb, because that is the only way we can have faith in the presence of Jesus alive and active in our lives today. The angels, as you might expect, got the two parts of this simple formula just right. They tell the women, “He is not here.” (This is belief -- the woman can see this for themselves) “He is risen!” (This is faith -- they can’t see Jesus, but they remember what he said about himself and his purpose).**

**Christ is risen! is a statement of faith because of what we cannot see: the body is not here. All those images of the crucifixion which flood Western Christianity: Jesus dying on the cross, blood across his forehead from the crown of thorns, a wound in his side -- we have historical documentation from Roman historians that this crucifixion happened. Crucifixion was humiliating and horrible, but we don’t have to imagine how it happened: we *know* how it happened and its effects on the human body. Artists have portrayed it in excruciating detail.**

**The resurrection, though. That is a trickier thing to portray. How do you paint or photograph what no one has seen? How do you show the image of what is not there? There is a concept in visual art and design called “negative space.” This is the space *around* an image. In three-dimensional design, such as garden design, it may literally be empty space. In graphic design it’s sometimes called “white space” -- the visual space around an image, or within letters or between words. Consider how difficult it would be to make sense of images or letters without negative space to show where the edges are. The empty tomb is the negative space which defines and enables us to understand who Christ is. This is true theologically, but it’s also been an element of Christian art for centuries. Think about it: without the empty tomb, how do we know that we’re looking at an image of the resurrected Jesus? No one really knows what a resurrected person looks like. It is only in relationship to the empty tomb -- what is not here--that resurrection makes sense.**

I want to show you some images, and invite you to think about what is there, and what is not there.

1. Women to tomb **He Qui** *contemporary Chinese these women are headed somewhere, but the real subject of the painting is outside the frame of the picture*

[http://mattstone.blogs.com/photos/resurrection\\_art/after-resurrection.jpg](http://mattstone.blogs.com/photos/resurrection_art/after-resurrection.jpg)

2. Chinese women *Notice the difference in energy in the posture of these women.*

[http://www.artbible.net/3JC/-Mat-28,01\\_Women\\_Resurrection\\_Femmes/17th\\_21th\\_Siecle/21%20HE%20QI%20BBB%20EASTER%20MORNING%2003.jpg](http://www.artbible.net/3JC/-Mat-28,01_Women_Resurrection_Femmes/17th_21th_Siecle/21%20HE%20QI%20BBB%20EASTER%20MORNING%2003.jpg)

3. Icon *Greek icon the empty tomb is actually portrayed so that we know that this is the risen Christ*

<http://vultus.stblogs.org/resurrection-gloriousicon-1000.jpg>

4. **Michelangelo Buonarroti** *Sketch*

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/67/MICHELANGELO\\_Buonarroti\\_-\\_Resurrection\\_\(1520-25\).jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/67/MICHELANGELO_Buonarroti_-_Resurrection_(1520-25).jpg)

5. Triptych **Mikhail Vrubel** *The risen Christ flanked by angels; Jesus often naked or clothed in white robe*

<http://www.slaviart-project.com/images/artists-and-artwork/modern-slavic-art/Vrubel/works/Resurrection.jpg>

6. Resurrected Christ **J Kirk Richards** *If you didn't know the title of this painting, there would be no cues to tell you this is the resurrected Christ*

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/14/84/88/148488f5b80d5f46e97887a307d4fc81.jpg>

7. Rainbow Christ **Stephen Whatley**

*Use of color to suggest something amazing and supernatural*

[https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2255/2357252831\\_17224ef6b8\\_b.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2255/2357252831_17224ef6b8_b.jpg)

8. breaking out **Photo image**

*I like the energy and motion of this photo -- not just whatever Jesus is breaking through, but how it charges the space around it. It's much more dynamic than pushing through a solid wall would be.*

[http://surveyofchristianity.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Resurrection\\_Side\\_Cs\\_500.jpg](http://surveyofchristianity.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Resurrection_Side_Cs_500.jpg)

9. Paper art **Peter Callesen**

*One of my favorites: what a great illustration of negative space and moving from 2 dimensions to 3 dimensions. So much more evocative than just a 3D figure.*

<http://www.pickchur.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/resurrection.jpg>

9. tomb with light **photo**

*This photo is all about what isn't here. The negative space is filled with light and a bird to suggest the presence of the Holy Spirit. I'm going to leave it up for a bit so you have some space to consider it.*

<http://www.hdwallpapersfreedownload.com/uploads/large/special-days/happy-easter-jesus-resurrection-risen-hd-wallpaper-background.jpg>

**It is not just Jesus Christ who is defined by negative space. I believe that we are all defined by what is not there: physically, or course, but also emotionally and spiritually. How much of our lives are defined by people who are not there? People who are no longer here, but have shaped our lives. Grandparents, parents, a spouse -- perhaps even a child -- these are relationships which continue to shape our lives, sometimes profoundly so, by the spaces they leave. It is our questioning more than our certainty which pushes us to define what is that we believe. And without doubt, our faith would be hollow. We decide how we let those spaces define us: do they lead to bitterness and despair, or to gratitude and love?**

**Faith is choosing to fill those negative spaces with light and hope and promise: with the conviction that Jesus is not here in the darkness of the tomb, Christ is alive! He is risen! Amen.**