

March 31, 2013
Easter Day/ The Resurrection of Our Lord

Easter Sunday file
(Series C)

St. Luke 24:5-8 (Gospel text)

And as they (the women) were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men (two angels) said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words.

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. There must be some mistake. Why are those women going to the cemetery? Don't they know any better? I suppose they think they are doing the right thing. It's just before dawn. Nobody is up, so they should be fine. They are quite a sizeable group, so there is safety in numbers. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women are there to finish what they started late last Friday evening, which is proper now that the Sabbath is over. But something isn't right. On the surface their behavior is proper; everything looks good. And yet, this text reveals a side to these women that has eluded me until now. They have a problem – not with the Roman guard, nor the huge stone, or even the fact that once inside the tomb they find no body! No, their real problem is ... unbelief! In their state of mind on that first Easter morning the women do not believe what Jesus told them about rising from the --

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

Why are we here this morning? More to the point, why are so many people convinced that they need to go to church on Easter Sunday? Is it the music, the melodies of hope and new life? Could it be the flowers, the sights, sounds, and smells of Spring? Or is it the tradition and customs we cherish with colored eggs, jelly beans, and bunnies? It seems like the right thing to do. There's nothing wrong with our behavior. And a good Easter Egg Hunt once a year, like a glass of milk, does a body good! And yet, if that's all there is to this special morning, we have a problem. It's the same problem those women had when they went to the tomb with ointments and spices. I never thought their problem was my problem, even when Dr. Luke diagnosed it in this text. Unbelief! When they went to the tomb their minds were blank on the subject of rising from the --

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

The resurrection never occurred to them.

What are you thinking?

Why are we here in church today?

Is it true that he who once was dead is now alive?

Do we believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Or, are we still not sure it is possible for anyone to come back from the --

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

The women at the tomb were stuck in the ashes. They were doing the work required by their religious community in the ashes. They were there to anoint a dead body in the ashes. They didn't feel like singing in the ashes. All they could do was stay together and finish what they started in the ashes. There were no alleluias in the ashes.

Notice how the first words spoken by the angels address the problem ...

Why do you seek the living among the dead?
(verse 5)

In Greek, the question is much more specific and personal. Why do you seek the (Gk: *zonta*) the *living one* with the (Gk: *nekron*) *dead ones*? The living one is Jesus, so why would he be in a place for dead people? It's a fair question. The obvious answer is that he would **not** be there, which leads to the next sentence ...

He is not here, but has risen.
(verse 6)

This should not have been a surprise. If the women truly believed, they should have expected nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. But they are no different than you or me. They may have heard the Word, but they do not believe it. They may have been in the presence of the Lord for over three years – and some even longer – but they are still locked in the ashes of sin and death. Their best of intentions, including everything they are doing on Easter Sunday according to religious custom and tradition, is clouded by unbelief. At this point they are still struggling in the ashes.

But then, comes the second part of the message.

*Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,
that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men
and be crucified and on the third day rise.*
(verse 7)

Now, we're talking. They are ready for some alleluias! The externals – the guard, the grave, the body gone – cannot block belief. With their spiritual batteries recharged, the women can't wait to share the good news! They start rising from the --
ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

It's simple. Dr. Luke writes the prescription ...

And they remembered his words. .
(verse 8)

We can take the same medicine. Remember his words. Jesus said it would be like this (Luke 9:44; 18:33). He taught very clearly that he would be arrested in Jerusalem, be crucified, and on the third day be raised. Start rising by believing in him!

- If you think saving faith is simply a matter of doing all the right things, think again.
- If you think after listening to all the right words, you will have the right faith, think again.
- If you think you're the only one who's ever struggled with sin and death, losing a friend, or coming in dead last, think again.
- If you think getting sick or suffering is punishment for not being perfect, better think again.

There is only one way to rise above the ashes. The way is a real person named Jesus Christ. He is the only cure for our disease. Remember his words to rise from --
ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

Christ is risen! (*response:*) **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

This is the simple message so often clouded by sin and death. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by the emotion and commotion of life, we stumble through the ashes instead of praising God with alleluias. We tell ourselves, well, the ashes are tolerable and familiar. And the alleluias are for church services not real life.

Consider this true story ...

My wife told me just last week that it was hard for her to remember any words, much less the right words spoken by Christ, when she went to the mortuary a few months ago. The message of Easter never crossed her mind when she was told to look at a computer screen of deceased loved ones. When the picture of her own mother appeared, it was hard for her to believe. Death was such a shock; it could have easily buried her in sorrow and unbelief. But somehow, hope which she had been given when she was a little girl enabled her to rise from the ...

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

On another occasion even closer to home ...

I remember going to the mortuary after my own father died on a Sunday morning nearly 27 years ago. It was hard to remember the words spoken by Christ about a resurrection when I saw him in a casket. His mother asked me to take his picture; that was difficult, too. But when I touched his folded hands, they were so cold it was hard to believe. Those same hands had taught me how to hold a spoon, a hammer, and a Bible. Death was such a shock; it could have easily buried me in sorrow and unbelief. But somehow, hope which he had given me when I was a boy enabled me to remember that someday we will all rise from the ...

ASHES TO ALLELUIAS!

Dr. Luke was the primary care physician for the apostle Paul. He was also with the world's greatest missionary when he wrote ...

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?

*The sting of death is sin,
and the power of sin is the law.*

*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

(1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

Christ is risen! (*response:*) **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

In Jesus' Name,
A M E N