



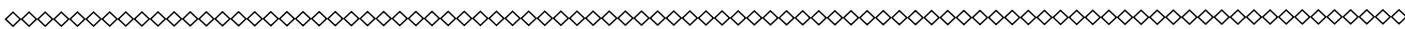
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Sermon Brief
Text: Luke 24:1-12

Title: Easter Sunday: He Is Not Here!

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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today is Easter Sunday, the most important day in the Christian calendar. Around the world Christians are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. On Wednesday the Bonn newspaper, *Die General Anzeiger*, ran an article about Easter celebration traditions around the world, "Osterbräuche aus aller Welt."¹ In it the writer summarized different traditions among Christians in different parts of the world. Most everywhere in the world the easter egg is associated with Easter. Sometimes it has a close connection to the resurrection of Jesus, but often it is more linked to a spring celebration that has roots in pagan religious traditions which pre-date Christianity. More importantly, however, is that Christians have celebrated Easter since the middle of the second century as a major Christian festival.



This is the first Easter that Claire and I have spent in Europe. And we're interested to observe how similar and how different the customs are between the US and Germany. So far we have noticed several common patterns: 1) massive advertisement by stores of Easter products and sales; 2) a lot of emphasis on Easter eggs, although the Easter egg hunt may not be quite as prominent here as in the US; 3) lots of people going on holidays during Easter. With the much longer school holiday at Easter here -- three weeks

compared to either one week, or just Good Friday -- more people seem to be traveling at Easter in Europe. One of the differences that seems to be present is the less emphasis on a Good Friday or a Maundy Thursday worship service here. In the US, more and more churches conduct services on at least one of these nights, and especially among evangelical churches. I can't yet say whether attendance in church zooms upward here like it does in the US. Most churches there will have one of their largest attendances of the entire year today. But as I used to feel as a pastor in the US, Easter is a difficult Sunday because of this extra high attendance. Because so many people showed up in church just this one time a year, the services were usually spiritually dead because of the presence of so many hypocritical 'Christians.' My prayer is that such a pattern won't develop here in our church.

Easter is resurrection day, and a time to celebrate. Jesus is alive! This is the message of the women who went to the tomb early Sunday morning to check on the body of the Lord. Luke 24:1-12 contains one of the four Gospel accounts of this experience.

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they went in, they did not find the body. **4** While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. **5** The women were terrified and bowed 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, but has risen. **6** Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7** that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." **8** Then they remembered his words, **9** and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. **10** Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. **11** But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. **12** But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at

¹ Osterbräuche aus aller Welt

Hamburg (dpa) - Ostern gilt als das älteste christliche Fest. Seit Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts gedenken Christen weltweit in dieser Zeit der Kreuzigung und Auferstehung Jesu Christi. In aller Welt haben sich sehr vielfältige Bräuche entwickelt. Hier einige Beispiele:

what had happened.²

This experience challenged everyone connected to Jesus. In spite of his having told them ahead of time what was going to happen in Jerusalem, they had great difficulty understanding the chain of events on Friday,

AUSTRALIEN: In Australien sind Kaninchen und Hasen verpönt, weil sie das ohnehin karge Weideland kahlfressen. Die Eier bringt stattdessen das Osterbilby, ein Beuteltier mit langer Nase und großen Ohren, das besonders unter der Kaninchenplage zu leiden hatte. Mehrere Schokoladenhersteller haben inzwischen einen Bilby aus Schokolade im Angebot.

BULGARIEN: Für die christlich-orthodoxen Bulgaren ist Ostern das größte Fest. Den gefärbten Ostereiern werden heilende und magische Kräfte zugeschrieben. Am Ostersonntag stoßen die Bulgaren die Eier gegeneinander. Der Besitzer des Eis, das dabei unbeschädigt bleibt, soll über das ganze Jahr gesund sein.

DEUTSCHLAND: Eier suchen und Schokoladenhasen essen sind typisch für das Osterfest. Seit Jahrhunderten werden auch Osterfeuer angezündet. Volkskundler sehen darin neben heidnischen Relikten auch christliche Bezüge. So wird dem Feuer erneuernde Kraft zugeschrieben und mit ihm der Winter vertrieben. Das Feuer zeigt aber auch die Freude an der Auferstehung Jesu, dem «Licht der Welt». Häufig spielt auch der Gedanke an eine Verbrennung des Judas eine Rolle, des Jüngers, der Jesus an die Römer verriet. Vor allem in sorbischen Gebieten wie der Lausitz werden Eier als Fruchtbarkeitssymbole über Felder und Wiesen gerollt.

FRANKREICH: Traditionell stellen die Pariser Chocolatiers in Handarbeit große Osterglocken und andere oft sündhaft teure Schokoladenfiguren her. Handel und Industrie bringen zudem zunehmend Osterhasen und andere saisonübliche Süßigkeiten auf den Markt. In der Bretagne werden am Karfreitag Veilchen ausgesät, die Blumen der griechischen Göttin Persephone. Nach einem Kompromiss zwischen ihrem Gatten, dem Unterweltgott Hades, und ihrer Mutter, der Fruchtbarkeitsgöttin Demeter, lebt die Göttin eine Hälfte des Jahres über und die andere Jahreshälfte unter der Erde.

GRIECHENLAND: Während der gesamten Osterwoche werden in allen Kirchen stundenlange Messen zelebriert. Am Samstag um Mitternacht verkünden die Priester: «Christus ist auferstanden.» «Er ist wahrhaftig auferstanden», erwidern die Gläubigen. Dazu wird ein großes Feuerwerk gezündet. Am Ostersonntag wird gefeiert: Es gibt Lammfleisch vom Spieß und Rotwein, dazu das «Kokoretsi» aus Innereien und dem Darm von Lämmern.

GROSSBRITANNIEN: Die Briten essen zu Karfreitag «cross buns», Rosinenbrötchen mit einem eingeritzten Kreuz. Zu Ostern lassen sie bunt gefärbte Eier um die Wette von einem Hügel kullern. Gewonnen hat beim «Eierrollen» der Besitzer des Eis, das zuerst unten ankommt.

ITALIEN: In vielen Dörfern gibt es Inszenierungen des Leidenswegs Christi («Via Crucis») und Oster-Prozessionen. Die Geschäfte bieten riesige Schokoladen-Ostereier in knallbunten Glanzfolien an, die mit allerlei Überraschungen gefüllt sind. Eine Spezialität ist die «Colomba Pasquale», die Ostertaube, ein Kuchen aus leichtem Hefeteig. Am Ostermontag gibt es zum Frühstück, das normalerweise nur aus einem süßen Croissant und Cappuccino besteht, ausnahmsweise Salami, eine «Torta Rustica» (ein rustikaler Kuchen, der mit Gemüse und Eiern gefüllt ist) und ein Gläschen Wermut.

PHILIPPINEN: Auf den Philippinen wird jedes Jahr am Karfreitag in dem Dorf Cutud rund 75 Kilometer nördlich der Hauptstadt Manila die Kreuzigung Jesu nachgestellt. Junge Männer tragen ein Holzkreuz auf einen Hügel und lassen sich dann mit fünf Zentimeter langen Nägeln an Händen und Füßen darauf festnageln. Mindestens fünf Minuten lang werden die Kreuze aufgerichtet. Die jungen Männer betrachten dies als Sühne. Die katholische Kirche kritisiert das Ritual.

RUSSLAND: Der orthodoxe Ostergottesdienst beginnt mit einer Prozession, bei der die Gemeinde mit Kreuzen und Kerzen um die Kirche zieht. In der Osternacht fährt die Moskauer Metro länger als üblich, damit die Gläubigen nach der stundenlangen Mitternachtsmesse nach Hause kommen können. Auf die strenge vorösterliche Fastenzeit folgt das Fastenbrechen mit «Pascha», einer gehaltvollen Quarkspeise, und dem Kuchen «Kulitsch».

SPANIEN: Ostern wird durch unzählige Prozessionen frommer Bruderschaften geprägt. Vielerorts sind die Teilnehmer mit spitzen Kapuzen ver mummt, die an Szenen der Inquisition erinnern. Es werden riesige Jesus- und Heiligenfiguren durch die Städte und Dörfer getragen. Manche Teilnehmer der Prozessionen tragen eiserne Ketten und sind aktiv Büßende.

SÜDAFRIKA: Eine österliche Spezialität sind die köstlich duftenden «Hot Cross Buns» - mit Zuckerguss-Kreuzen überzogene

Artikel vom 08.04.2009

²Καὶ τὸ μὲν σάββατον ἡσύχασαν κατὰ τὴν ἐντολήν. 24.1 τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ὀρθρου βαθέως ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἦλθον φέρουσαι ἃ ἠτοίμασαν ἀρώματα. 24.2 εὔρον δὲ τὸν λίθον ἀποκεκυλισμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, 24.3 εἰσελθοῦσαι δὲ οὐχ εὔρον τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. 24.4 καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἀπορεῖσθαι αὐτὰς περὶ τούτου καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο ἐπέστησαν αὐταῖς ἐν ἐσθῆτι ἀστραπτούσῃ. 24.5 ἐμφόβων δὲ γενομένων αὐτῶν καὶ κλινουσῶν τὰ πρόσωπα εἰς τὴν γῆν εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτάς, Τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν· 24.6 οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη. μνήσθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν ἔτι ὢν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ 24.7 λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι. 24.8 καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ. 24.9 καὶ ὑποστρέψασαι ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου ἀπήγγειλαν ταῦτα πάντα τοῖς ἔνδεκα καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς λοιποῖς. 24.10 ἦσαν δὲ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία καὶ Ἰωάννα καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ σὺν αὐταῖς. ἔλεγον πρὸς τοῦ ἀποστόλου ταῦτα, 24.11 καὶ ἐφάνησαν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὡσεὶ λῆρος τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα, καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς. 24.12 Ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἀναστὰς ἔδραμεν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει τὰ ὀθόνια μόνα, καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός.

Saturday, and Sunday of Passover week.

To be sure many people in our day have similar difficulties. The message that Jesus is alive seems to be “an idle tale” (λῆρος) just as it did at first to the disciples. But for the eleven apostles it didn’t remain such for long. Once they realized the women were telling them the truth, their questioning of the resurrection turned into joyous celebration that Jesus was indeed alive.

On this Easter Sunday, we can learn something important from the women who first received the news of Jesus’ resurrection. I want to summarize it with three words: seeking, confirmation, sharing. Let us seek Jesus. We will be given confirmation that he is alive. Then we must share that news with others.

BODY

I. Seeking, vv. 1-3

The women came to the tomb seeking Jesus. They thought they were going to find a dead body there. But in their devotion to the Lord they still wanted to properly take care of the corpse. Note some important aspects of their seeking in the first three verses.

The gospel writers mention that the women went to the tomb “on the first day of the week” (τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων). In the ancient Jewish calculation of time, the beginning point for this day was sundown Saturday. The women had prepared spices Friday afternoon for Jesus’ burial but observed the Jewish sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Then before sunup on Sunday morning, they made their way to the place where Jesus was buried in order to do the proper burial procedure on his body. The exact location of both the crucifixion and burial sites is not absolutely certain, but lay somewhere outside the city walls of the old city of Jerusalem.

Each gospel writer focuses on different sets of women present. Matthew lists Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary.” Mark stresses Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome. Later (v. 10) Luke will list Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women.” John will zero in only on Mary Magdalene.

Several Marys show up and can become confusing. Altogether in the NT, six different women by the name of Mary are mentioned: 1 Mary the mother of Jesus; 2 Mary Magdalene, a women from Magdala; 3 Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha; 4 Mary of Cleophas the mother of James the less; 5 Mary the mother of John Mark, a sister of Barnabas; 6 Mary, a Roman Christian who is greeted by Paul in Rom. 16:6. Collectively from the gospel accounts, numbers 1, 2, and 4 are listed as present at the empty tomb. The “other Mary” in Matthew may perhaps be number 3. In addition, Salome (Mk) and Joanna (Lk) are mentioned, along with some other unnamed women (Lk). The Joanna mentioned here is most likely the same person mentioned in Luke 8:1-3, as the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and part of a group of women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve during Jesus’ Galilean ministry. These women most likely are the ones that Luke means by the expression “the other women.”

Although a frequent part of the interpretative emphasis of these verses, one needs reminding of the central role that women played in the resurrection event, as well as the larger ministry of Jesus. Luke especially emphasized this in his story of Jesus. Christianity’s first witnesses to the resurrection were women, who lived in a society that frequently did not value them beyond being a wife and a mother. The reason for them being the first witnesses is their devotion to the Lord and desire to make certain that his body was properly prepared for burial. In showing their love in a risky situation they found marvelous blessing. One never knows the blessing to be derived from simple, sincere demonstration in ministry the love for the Lord that is possessed.

What can we learn from these women? Several important things.

First, they loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him, even thinking that He was dead and no longer could help them. These women had consistently followed Jesus all over Galilee for the majority of His public ministry. To be sure, their hope that He would prove to be the long awaited Jewish Messiah had been dashed on Good Friday as they watched Him die on the cross. But in spite of dissappointment they still wanted to do the right thing with the body of the Lord in anointing it properly for burial.

What about you? Do you really seek the Lord? Do you really love Him? These women were blessed with confirmation in large part because they were willing to risk themselves to express their love for Jesus in going to the tomb. You will discover the blessed news of Easter as indeed true only as you reach out to Him in genuine love and devotion. Commitment that is willing to risk itself.

Second, they wanted to serve the Lord. The men, unfortunately, were hiding in a room somewhere in Jerusalem paralyzed by fear of the authorities. Did they love the Lord? Yes, of course they did. But unlike the women they were not willing to risk themselves in ministry action for Jesus. Consequently, they missed out on the greatest discovery ever made by human beings. You may claim to love Christ. But until you’re willing to risk yourself in showing that love, you will not experience the great discovery of Jesus that these women had that first Easter Sunday.

Easter today still means 'seeking' just as it did to these women some two thousand years ago. I challenge you today: Seek Jesus. Seek Him in sincerity and with deep commitment. Follow the example of these women!

II. Confirmation, vv. 4-7

When the women reached out in devotion to Jesus, they made the greatest discovery of their lives. Verses 4-7 provide Luke's account of that discovery. Note some of the details.

Although all four of the gospel writers record the angelic appearance, they have their own very different ways of describing it. Matthew is the most dramatic with his declaration, "2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." Mark is much more subdued in his account: "5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed." Luke is somewhere between these two with his, "4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,..."

The fourth gospel goes a very different direction from that of the synoptics. John began with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb by herself. When she noticed the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away from the opening, she ran to tell Peter (v. 2), who then came along with John to inspect the situation (vv. 3-9). "Then the disciples returned to their homes" (v. 10). After Peter and the others had left the tomb, Mary was still there when she glanced into the tomb and discovered two angels sitting at the place where Jesus' feet had been in burial (vv. 11-13). Finishing a conversation with the angels, she turned to leave and Jesus appeared to her directly (vv. 14-17), although she didn't recognize him at first.

Uniformly through the four accounts is the angelic announcement to the women that Jesus was no longer in the grave, that he was alive, that the Twelve were to meet him in Galilee as he had previously arranged.

In none of the accounts is there a detailed description of the resurrection event of Jesus himself. Matthew comes closer to that with the dramatic mention of an earthquake, but none attempt to describe exactly how resurrection happened. I suspect there's an important point here for later generations of Christians. Our modern Enlightenment way of thinking is curious about how God did that. For some the inability to rationally understand how it happened raises doubt about whether or not it actually happened.

But the ancient world was more interested in the mystery of God's presence and power. The sense of awe in the presence of the divine was central. When we lose this in our religious faith, we impoverish our spiritual life. The angels overwhelmed the women initially, but then reassured them of God's care and activity. One of the implications of this segment is that God's powerful presence, however He chooses to manifest it, needs to bring us to our knees. But also we need to remember that the overwhelming presence brings instructions and encouragement as well. At the heart of those instructions is a meeting with Jesus.

What the ladies sought at the tomb, they didn't find. They were looking for a dead Jesus. But instead, they found two angels with the exciting news that Jesus was alive. God blessed their devotion by allowing them to be the first ones to receive the Heavenly message: "He is not here, but has risen" (οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη). God will bless your seeking Jesus as well. There will come even better confirmation than was given to the women. They received a report from two angels. But you will receive the witness of God's very own Spirit, as Paul says in Rom. 8:15-16:

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

God wants to affirm to you that Jesus is indeed risen from the grave and lives today. Seek Him and you will be able to sing with the saints of old:

He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives, he lives, salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know he lives: he lives within my heart.

III. Sharing, vv. 8-12

The final word from the women for us today is 'sharing.' Note the details of verses 8-12 against the backdrop of the other gospel accounts.

Again the individual gospel accounts are very different from each other. Matthew describes the women excitedly leaving the tomb to go tell the disciples about Jesus as the angel had instructed them. But they meet the resurrected Jesus who intercepts them on their way to the disciples. He reinforces the angel's instructions about the meeting with the disciples in Galilee. For Matthew this meeting will become the climax of his story

of Jesus with the Great Commission (28:16-20).³ With the original ending of Mark's gospel at 16:8, we are left with the women leaving the tomb in fear and daring to speak to no one about what they had seen.⁴ Mark evidently highlighted the women's fear and awe as the climatic moment of his story to leave us readers with the final thought of how utterly amazing this resurrection event of Jesus is. Luke brings the women to the disciples, with Peter then going to see for himself after the rest of the disciples were doubtful of the trustworthiness of the women's report. In John's account,⁵ Peter had entered the tomb but didn't initially understand the significance of it. John concluded the entire story with Mary faithfully announcing the resurrection of the Lord to the disciples.

When the angel had reminded the women of Jesus' earlier words in Galilee (v. 8), they remembered. "Oh yes, He did tell us that He was going to die but be raised back to life." What Jesus had said and what they now were experiencing came together and produced understanding. Now they knew what He had meant. Their natural response was to go tell the apostles and others about this exciting news. To be sure, as Matthew relates, the angels told them to share this news with the disciples. But they really didn't need to be told to do so. Such marvelous news as this had to be shared. No one could have held them back. Even though the men didn't believe them at first, they still shared the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Their example challenges us today. We have gathered today to celebrate Easter. God has declared, "He is not here! He has risen!" Now what will we do with this good news?

CONCLUSION

What can we learn from this? For one thing, just the empty tomb isn't enough to understand the resurrection. We need interpretation of it by eye witnesses. Then we are caught up in the joy and excitement of "He's alive!" To encounter Him personally is life changing.

³Mt. 28:8-10 (NRSV)

8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

⁴Mk. 16:8 (NRSV)

8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were

⁵Jn. 20:2-9, 18 (NRSV)

2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.