

Why do you Look for the Living among the Dead?
Luke 24:1-12, 13-27

Brothers and sisters, as you have been staying at home and self-isolating, perhaps you have been watching a lot of movies and TV shows to help pass the time.

I know a lot of my online connections have been watching a movie about a pandemic called Contagion – though I don't know why you would want to watch that when we're living it right now.

Another movie that has been popular for similar reasons is 2013's World War Z starring Brad Pitt. However, in this movie the virus doesn't make people sick – it turns them zombies and very quickly the world is turned upside down by the zombie apocalypse.

And this movie – and others about zombies have stayed popular, not just because of recent circumstances but because the appeal of zombie movies and TV shows somehow refuses to die.

Case in point, people still like to dress up as zombies and hang out together at zombie parties – even when it's not Halloween

And the popular television series “the Walking Dead”- a show about surviving after society has been decimated by a zombie apocalypse is going into its 10th season!

And if you are having a hard time getting your teenaged zombie enthusiast to focus and read classic literature while they are stuck at home doing online classes – don't worry, you can get them the zombie version of Jane Austin's “Pride and Prejudice.”

So for whatever reason, the undead have struck a chord with the living - and while vampires and those Twilight movies are long gone, the zombies are still around.

Now if I was to offer my own educated guess as to why this is, I would suggest it's because, we are becoming more and more disillusioned with the things that we believed would give us a life and make us happy.

Now I know that current circumstances have put a great deal of these things on pause and we are very focused and caught up in how this is affecting all of us.

But its ok to set that aside for a moment and step outside of the immediate circumstances to reflect on the bigger picture of where things have been going over the past few decades.

For example, when my parents were young it was pretty much guaranteed that if you went to University and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree – you would get a good job...

And this would lead to a good career and a good salary, that would allow you to provide for a family and save for your retirement – and this was a good life and it would make you happy.

Now many of us would like to believe this route to the good life is still possible to follow in our day – but so many things have happened since then, including our current situation, which say otherwise...

Instead, we are discovering – to our dismay; that the debt load needed to get all the schooling you require, the economic uncertainty and its effects on the job market, the sacrifices you must make to start a business or advance your career, the broken relationships along the way – all these things and many more factors.... are all slowly but surely - draining us of the life and happiness we expected to find.

And we're trapped because what other option do we have?

Walk away and leave it all behind? Not really. We've made commitments, people are counting on us, and what else could we do to find happiness, what else can we do to pay the bills and sustain life?

So we continue on, hoping that somehow we will find happiness and life in this rat race in spite of everything that says otherwise.

And if truth be told, it kind of feels like we are dying alive – like we are the living dead, like we are zombies.

So brothers and sisters – I would say that zombies are still in... because we can relate to feeling like a zombie.

And that's why I also think, that what the angels said to the women in the tomb is so relevant for us today...

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Friends, if the resurrection of Jesus says anything to us this morning... at the very least it confronts us with this question and it requires that we give an explanation- an answer as to why we continue to live the way we do - now that the tomb is empty.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Why are you doing what you are doing? Why do you live the way you live?

Friends, the women would have answered that they had come to the tomb to do was in accordance with the proper

traditions and burial customs of their people, to anoint Jesus' body with spices as a way to show respect, honor the dead and preserve their memory.

Or even simpler perhaps was that it was all about their relationship with someone they loved.

Fine... but now that the tomb is empty what will you do?

And Peter would have answered that he had come to the tomb looking to see if what the women had said was true, that he was investigating – looking for clues that might reveal and explain what had taken place.

Ok... but now that you found an empty tomb what will you do?

And the disciples who were leaving Jerusalem, walking back to Emmaus, would have answered that sadly they were going back to what they had always done, waiting and hoping for

another Messiah who would be able to deliver them from the Romans.

I see... but what do you think it means that the tomb was found empty?

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Friends, we might find that our answers are very similar to the women, to Peter and those walking to Emmaus.

Like the women, we may find that we live our lives the way we do because of tradition or custom or culture.

It's what everyone else is doing, this is the way it is, you go to school, get the job, pursue the career, fall in love have a family, save for retirement, try to stay healthy so you can enjoy your retirement... that's just how it goes.

Or we might say that we do what we do - because life is about relationships and those whom you love and that's all that matters.

Or maybe we are more like Peter, a bit impulsive, bold, and stubborn – we're going to carve our own path, we're going to see for ourselves – we won't accept it or do it just because someone else says so. We're going through life investigating and trying to figure it out for ourselves...

Or perhaps we might discover that we share more in common with the disciples who travelling down the road to Emmaus - because we also have travelled a little ways down the road of life.

And just like those disciples, we started out with such high hopes and great expectations about what life could offer, but it didn't turn out like we expected it to.

So now... what we do, how we live, is characterized by regret, bitterness, cynicism, and a determination that we won't allow ourselves to get fooled again.

I don't know friends, can you relate to what I talking about here?

Can you see how the angels' words confront us and cause us to look at, and give an answer as to why we live our lives the way we do?

"Why are we looking for the living among the dead?" Did you ever consider that could be a phrase to describe how live our lives – looking for life and happiness where we will not find it...

And friends, now that we have seen and heard that the tomb is empty – can we really go on living as we always have?

Especially when what we are looking for is life!

Especially when we aren't really or fully finding it in how we currently live...

Friends, the empty tomb and the angels' words mean that it is possible for us to start looking for life elsewhere and it is possible that we can find it!

And as we celebrate this Easter in the midst of a pandemic that has drastically altered how we are living our lives – we have an even greater opportunity to reflect on and evaluate how we have been living our lives and looking for life in that firm routine of work and sleep and coffee.

So this Easter the Lord is giving us not just a message about doing this, but the very circumstances which will enable us to act on it.

Brothers and sisters - we need to stop looking for the living among the dead, and we must start looking for life among the living - we must look for Jesus.

And just to be clear looking for Jesus means that we are looking for the resurrected Jesus.

Because many people are willing to admit that Jesus was some sort of historical figure, a good teacher, perhaps even a prophet of some sort – but the resurrected Jesus shows that He was far more, much more than those things.

Many people are willing to try to co-opt Jesus for their social cause – because they see the futility and injustice in way of life – so they enlist Jesus as an advocate for their ideology which they believe will bring a better life to us.

Jesus the environmentalist, Jesus the socialist, the woke Jesus who affirms you and always votes progressive – but the resurrected Jesus does not bring life through ideology or social activism.

So – in saying that we must look for Jesus, we must understand that we are looking for the resurrected Jesus.

Now telling you to look for the risen Jesus sounds all well and good, but what does that actually mean and can we actually do that?

Because the fact is that our risen Lord has ascended to Heaven; and He is there right now... reigning with God the Father until the day when He will return to make all things new. So we can't physically go looking for the risen Jesus to find the life we desire.

However the good news is, as Romans 8:11 says, *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”*

In other words friends, the Spirit of God which raised Jesus back to life can also live in us and give us life!

So we don't have to physically go looking for the risen Jesus to find life, we can look for Him spiritually by opening ourselves up to the working and the power of His Holy Spirit.

In fact if we were to keep on reading in Luke 24, we would see the risen Jesus appear to his twelve disciples in Jerusalem and tells them *“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:49)

And just look at the difference in the lives of the disciples when the Holy Spirit put the life of Jesus in them.

Remember how we saw the disciples react on Good Friday? Jesus needed to wrestle in prayer with His heavenly Father about going to the cross; He asked the disciples to stay and pray with Him - but they couldn't even stay awake!

And when Jesus handed himself over to the religious leaders - the disciples ran away..

When Peter was identified as being one of the Jesus' followers - he denied knowing Him;
And after Easter morning - when Jesus appears to them in Jerusalem, they are just a handful of frightened scared men

hiding out in a home and they don't know what they should do next.

However - once the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them they are no longer scared and frightened – in fact Peter boldly gets up in front of a crowd in Jerusalem and says to them:

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” (Acts 2:22-24)

What a difference! Peter is full of the life of Jesus now. And this life transformed him into someone who would stand in front of a crowd and charge them with killing the Messiah...

The disciples are now full of the Holy Spirit, full of the resurrected life of Jesus Christ and their lives are very different – they are no longer looking for the living among the dead, but they are proclaiming Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

And friends, what happened to the disciples can become a reality in our lives as well... and quite honestly we need it to become a reality in our lives – and not just because it *feels* like we are the living dead... we are the living dead.

But because the truth is that unless we have the life of the Spirit of Jesus in us - we really are the living dead, not actual zombies, but actual sinners; people who do not believe in, or thank, or show love or obey God...

We are people who are constantly turn good things into god things, and who are continually looking for life in the creation... instead of in the Creator – and all this leads to our death and destruction, both individually and for the planet.

Brothers and sisters – why continue to look for the living among the dead? The tomb is empty! We will not find what we are looking for there.

But we will find the life that we need and desire in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and He is willing and waiting to send His Spirit work to in you if you pray and ask Him for it.

That’s what Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem all those years ago and it’s still true today

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Friends, we must turn away from seeking life from the creation – life comes from God alone who raised Jesus Christ from the dead by power the Holy Spirit.

And if you believe what you’ve heard this morning friends – then take these words with you this week *“why do you look*

for the living among the dead" and keep them in the back of your mind.

And as we have this season of interruption and waiting, take the opportunity the God has provided and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you are trying to find life and happiness and fulfilment in good things instead of in God, if we are looking to the creation to sustain us instead of the Creator...

And ask Jesus Christ to help you understand what real life and happiness truly is -

so that you can instead ask Jesus to forgive you and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the life and happiness and fulfilment you need and are looking for.

Friends let us not look for the living among the dead – but let us be living proof of the power and the work of the Spirit that raised our Lord from the dead! Amen.