

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

Brothers and sisters, it seems that zombies just won't die. And I don't mean this literally as a description of what zombies are. What I mean is that Zombies are still in, they are still popular. For whatever reason, it seems that the undead have struck a chord with the living and it just won't die off.

Its not like when vampires were popular 17 years ago in 2008 and the Twilight movies had their moment in the sun... remember those – they are now long gone, but zombies are still around.

I kind of noticed the zombie thing getting started back in 2013 when Brad Pitt and Paramount Studios made the zombie apocalypse movie World War Z. I guess when an A-list actor and a major studio picked up on this theme - it's obvious that what started out years ago as a low budget B-movie trend in the 80's has grown into something much bigger.

Since that time, we've had a long running TV show about surviving in a post-zombie apocalypse world called "The Walking Dead" and just as that wrapped up in 2022 after 11 seasons, a new TV series with a similar undead theme called "the Last of Us" started up, and looks to be just as popular.

Even the kids Minecraft video game has zombies in it! And if I understand the characters correctly from recently watching the movie, if the netherworld pigs go into the overworld – they have to drink a special potion to avoid zombification.

And, I found out that even when its not Halloween – some people still like to dress up as zombies and hang out together and have zombie parties.

You can even find all sorts of classic literature, like Jane Austin's famous book "Pride and Prejudice" redone in zombie versions. So, I guess its true when they say that the classics never really die.

So , brothers and sisters, as I said zombies are still in... the living still seem to be fascinated by the undead.

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 good life and make us happy.

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...

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

We'd still like to believe this is possible today – but so many things have happened since then which say otherwise... and coincidently have become policy points in our current federal election.

The reality that many people are now living, especially the younger generations – to our dismay – is one where the debt load needed to get all the schooling you require is crippling.

The economic uncertainty and its effects on the job market means there are less good paying jobs available. The sacrifices required to start a business or to advance your career are costly, the broken relationships along the way are too much collateral.

The reality is that these circumstances and many others factors are all slowly but surely - draining us of the vitality and happiness we expected to find in life.

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 but keep going to pay the bills and try to 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?”

Brothers and sisters, 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?

Brothers and sisters, the women's answer would have been that they had come to the tomb 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 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... now that you've 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?"

Brothers and sisters, 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, and

what we expected the Messiah to do - 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 Brothers and sisters, can you relate to what I talking about here?

Can you see how the angels' words confront us and challenge 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 this could be a phrase to describe how live our lives – looking for life and happiness where we will not find it...

But Brothers and sisters, now that we have seen and heard that the tomb is empty – can we really go on living as we always have? Especially when we are looking for is life!

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

Brothers and sisters, 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!

But... we need to stop looking for the living among the dead, and start looking for life among the living - we must look for the risen Lord Jesus Christ – the Christ of the Covenants as promised in the Old Testament and revealed to us in the gospels of the New Testament.

Don't be duped by presentations of Jesus from other sources, the academic historical Jesus, Jesus the good teacher, or Jesus the social activist, or as advertised the Jesus who gets us.

No – the empty tomb tells us we must look for the Risen Lord Jesus Christ and not some other Jesus, because only this Jesus has beaten death and not simply come back to life – but He has resurrection life – a life that overcomes death itself.

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

If you know how the story goes from this morning, you know that our risen Lord has now ascended into 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. And the resurrection is the real deal – so its incongruent to suggest we look for Him metaphorically.

However the good news and the reality of how we look for the risen Christ is described for us in Romans 8:11. Paul 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 Brothers and sisters, the Spirit of God who 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 don't have to figure out some kind of metaphorical way to do this, instead we can look for Him spiritually by opening ourselves up to the working and the power of His Holy Spirit and cooperating with the 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 at the difference it made in the lives of the disciples when they had the life of the Holy Spirit in them.

We need look no farther back than the events of Good Friday. Remember Jesus needed to wrestle in prayer with His heavenly Father about going to the cross; and He asked the disciples to stay and keep watch with him for a while - but the disciples couldn't even stay awake to pray with Him, they all fell asleep!

Then, 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 when Jesus appears to them in Jerusalem, they just a handful of frightened scared men hiding out in an upper room, and they have no idea what they should be doing 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! To be transformed 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 life... 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 Brothers and sisters, 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...

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, give thanks, or show love to or give obedience to God...

People who are constantly turning good things into god things, turning our relationships, our jobs, our hobbies, and our

families into idols and centering our lives around them instead of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

We are people who are continually looking for the source of real life from the creation... instead of from the Creator – and ironically idolizing all the good gifts of God saps our strength and drains us and you can best see how we try to find life in the creation by how we pursue our get-a-ways, vacations, and holidays, or the emphasis on work-life balance, having some “me-time” or “self-care” or “living our best life!”

And if it was simply just a matter of ending up feeling tired and burnt out, it might not be so bad... but idolatry and seeking life from the creation instead of the Creator has some pretty devastating consequences.

Take food and human sexuality for example – both are good gifts from God; through which He *gives* life – but they are not the Source of Life. But we center our lives on them as if they were – and that leads to health issues; obesity, diabetes, cholesterol, anorexia, cancers, and so on...

And think of all the problems that we have in our world because we run after sexuality like it's a source of life. There's relationship problems, unwanted pregnancies – which leads to the abortion issue, there's pornography and prostitution – which feeds the human trafficking problem, there's rape and blackmailing, and all sorts of social and criminal problems that come as a result of looking to our human sexuality for life.

Brothers and sisters, turning good things into god things, looking for life apart from the Creator, it all eventually leads to death and destruction, both individually and for our world.

But the tomb is empty, death has been defeated, the power of sin has been broken – we no longer need to look for the living among the dead! We will not find what we're looking for there.

But you will find the life that you need and want in and through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and our Lord is willing and waiting to send His Spirit work to in you if you pray and ask Him for it, and what better day to do that than on Easter!

Remember what Peter – full of the life of the Spirit - told the crowd in Jerusalem all those years ago? 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)

Brothers and sisters, 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.

Just confess and tell the Risen Lord Jesus that you've been looking for life in all the wrong places, tell Him that its not working for you, ask Him to forgive you for this, and ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit and to give you resurrection life!

And if you believe what you've heard this morning Brothers and sisters – 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.

As you go about your day-to-day business 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, in the creation instead of the Creator, and ask Him to show you how to switch your god things back into good things...

Sometimes its as simple as saying a prayer of thanks for the food you're about to eat – acknowledging its from God. Sometimes its more complicated, like learning how to unlearn trusting in your work for provision, but still working... Like learning how to unlearn seeking life from a spa day, but still taking a spa day – as a good gift from Jesus.

But Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would remind us of what Jesus taught and would also lead us into all truth – that included the truth of how to live receiving good things from God and not turning them into god things.

So Brothers and sisters, now that you have seen the tomb is empty – why do you live as you live? Let us not look for the living among the dead – but let us be the living proof that

there is new life available for us through the power and the work of the Spirit who raised our Lord from the dead! Amen.