

## ***The Empty Tomb: A Place of Life*** – Luke 24:1-11

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Some call it making death personal or keeping memories alive. Some call it coffin commercialism. Those who want to make a final statement about their life can now choose customized, personalized, caskets to tell their story. Business is thriving at the Whitelight Casket Company of Dallas, Texas for instance, which has introduced a line of “art caskets” for those who wouldn’t be caught dead in something routine. No longer must the discriminating consumer choose merely between a traditional wooden box and a boring bronze coffin. If you are a golfer, you might choose the popular “Fairway to Heaven” model; other popular styles of personalized caskets include a beach scene, the New York skyline, or a model portraying a postal package that says in bold, red letters, “Return to Sender.” Does that sound like a fresh idea? The truth is, individualized coffins as personalized “final statements” are not so new after all. Many ancient cultures, including the Egyptians, for instance, were masters of this practice. Tomb preparation began long before a person’s death, with craftsmen engineering a coffin to make a statement revealing what that person had accomplished in life, especially in preparation for impressively meeting the gods—at least that’s what some Egyptians believed.

Thankfully, we Christians don’t suffer from coffin confusion. Easter morning for us injects a conviction into the confusion about life and death: the tomb of Jesus Christ is empty. This unexpectedly empty tomb is God’s final statement to a questioning world. But what does it mean for us today? We aren’t interested in mere empty caskets, so it’s hard to see the significance of Jesus Christ’s tomb echoing with emptiness. No decorated pillars or towering pyramids mark his gravesite. No cave drawings tell his story. No golden trinkets were buried with him to signify his royal power. There was just an empty tomb. That’s because God did not celebrate his Son’s accomplishments at his burial place but in his believing people—us. Just as Jesus Christ is risen from death, so we are raised up from spiritual and physical death, from dullness and despair to a life filled with vigor to take on yet another week with confidence in the strength God provides and filled with vitality to smile through good times and bad, through life and death with the sure hope of God’s help. Jesus’ empty tomb is a place of remembering and a place of life.

The first Easter was a swirl of activity and emotion. Women come to the tomb with spices and find that the tomb is open and the body of Jesus is gone. They come across men who dress like lightning. And when these men talk, they know what these women are doing: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” They know what has happened: “He is not here, but has risen!” and they even know what has been done and said in their past: “Remember how He told you, while He was still with you 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” (Luke 24:5–6). These men know these women even though the women have never seen them before in their lives. And in the midst of all of this commotion, what does Luke focus our attention upon? Luke, when he puts it all together, calls our attention to one simple act: “They remembered His words” (v. 8). That’s what Luke wants us to know this morning as we celebrate Easter. On that first Easter morning, when

Jesus rose from the dead, in the midst of the wonder, the fear, and the worship, His people simply and faithfully did one single thing: “They remembered His words.”

God on Easter morning sent angels to the tomb to help His people remember, and this morning through His Word He helps us to remember as well. God has made the empty tomb a place of remembering for us this morning in order that we might truly rejoice in what Christ does for us on Easter.

Today, the Church remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus because this event makes life in this world richer and full of meaning. All of us have sins in our past that make us fearful about going on. Anger at your boss has fractured your working relationship. Gossip about co-workers has made friends your enemies. Ending an unwanted pregnancy began a life of horrible regret. A broken marriage, a broken childhood, a broken relationship with God. These things come to mind, and we are uncertain how we can move on. It seems as if our past has destroyed our future. But God comes today and speaks to us. He says, “Remember My Son. Jesus. He gave His life for you. Your sins are forgiven. He has risen and rules and is now the author of life. Through Him, you are a child of My kingdom. In Him, you are a member of My family. With Him, your life is now part of My work in history.” When God makes His love known in Jesus, we are freed from our sins and live in God’s kingdom. Christ has risen. He has defeated death. He has overcome sin. He is the author of life.

Today, we also celebrate that the empty tomb is a place of life. Once again we set the scene: the women were tired and emotionally drained from the events of the past two days that suddenly snatched away their Master’s life. Their arms were full of spices to anoint a dead body, eyes full of tears, hearts full of disappointment and fear. The women came looking not for Jesus, the almighty Son of God who can do anything, but for Jesus, the humble Nazarene carpenter’s son. They came looking not for Jesus, the Lord of Life who had already demonstrated his power over death by raising dead people to life, but for Jesus, the innocent victim of a political conspiracy.

“Remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” The angel lifted their heads and hearts back up to higher expectations by pointing them to the place where a dead Jesus ought be, but was not. “He has risen! He is not here.” There was nothing to be alarmed about, and nothing to be afraid of. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Empty hearts and lives are now filled with new expectations, new dreams, and new hopes! Ladies, now drop your spices (you don’t need them!) and run for a better reason, to announce to the world that your Savior reigns over sin, death, and the grave, and Satan has been defeated, just as he said. His empty tomb is a place full of life for you!

Like these women, our lack of faith and our low level of expectation disappoint our great and mighty God for whom nothing is impossible. He’s ready to help us move mountains, and our droopy faces don’t look past the bumps in the road. All of it is a natural reaction. Not anymore,

fellow believers, because our risen Jesus won't have it! His empty tomb is a place of life for you—a life filled with higher expectations. Stop expecting to feel only sad and separated because your loved one is dying, or died before you wanted—the empty tomb raises your expectations to anticipate a glorious reunion in heaven: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men,” Paul exhorts us in 1 Corinthians. “In Christ all will be made alive” (15:19,22).

Paul also writes in Colossians, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, . . . not on earthly things” (Col 3:1,2). The resurrected, glorified body of Christ passed through the burial clothes and the tomb itself only to appear shortly thereafter in physical, visible form. If God can do that, can't he also change your circumstances to help you pass through another week without harm? God can make the impossible happen.

This all began at the empty tomb. The empty tomb, which is a place of life, is a place that you and I can come and see. Not just today or on Sundays, but every day we can get out the Scriptures and read them for ourselves and find that the tomb is still empty so that our lives may be full – full of forgiveness, full of faith. As we come and see we realize our lives are changed. As we come and see we can also rejoice and be glad in our salvation, and even excited to go and tell. Go and tell that simple message that we hear in Acts 4: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved, than Jesus Christ our Lord.” Yes, the simple message that the angel first spoke on that very first Easter; “Don't be afraid! He is not here but has risen!” Come and see and then joyfully, go and tell. The empty tomb is a place of life. Amen.