

Why Look For The Living Among The Dead?

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Christ is risen and that changes everything. I think I've quoted from St. John Chrysostom's Easter Homily every Easter for the past few years. Let me quote again this morning. **"Christ is risen and hell is overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave."** ...St. John Chrysostom Hear the good news! And I would add, **Christ is risen and this changes everything!** Hallelujah. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

The atoning death and resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. James Boice said, **"Easter proves that Jesus is God, that he is the Savior, that death is not the end for anyone, that there is a resurrection. Thus Jesus' resurrection proves everything that is essential about Christianity."** ...James Boice The truth, the good news of Easter and the resurrection makes all the difference. It's a big deal! I want to take a moment to look at the gospel account of Jesus' burial and resurrection and then I want to ask three questions. Turn to Luke 23:44-24:12 and let's read his account. Then look at John 20:1-18.

Jesus asked the first question of Mary Magdalene. **"Who is it you are looking for?"** **John 20:15** We could ask who or what are you looking for? The women came to the tomb looking for the body of Jesus with plans to essentially embalm his body, i.e. to prepare his body with spices and perfumes. In reading the account, a couple of things immediately stand out.

First, think about how quickly they forgot who they were dealing with. Imagine... they were coming to embalm the giver of life! He had said he was "The way, the truth and the life... ..the resurrection and the life." It seems a bit presumptuous, doesn't it, to expect to embalm and bury the life giver? I realize they watched him die with their own eyes, there was no denying that Jesus was dead, but they had watched him call Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead and buried for four days. This was no ordinary rabbi they were talking about.

We sometimes forget who we are dealing with, don't we? We forget who He really is. We forget He is the giver of life and the source for all we are, all we have, all we need. We forget the bible says, **"Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together...For God was pleased to**

have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:15-20

Death has come, but remember who we are talking about. A little bit of death can't stop the giver of life. This is no ordinary man. Remember this when tragedy and heartbreak come into your life. You may be hurting, struggling, in pain, disappointed. You may feel your dreams and hopes are dead and buried but remember who He is! Remember who you are dealing with – the one who is the resurrection and the life! No power can defeat him. Death can't hold him, the grave couldn't keep him. His resurrection means all things are possible. His resurrection means resurrection for you, resurrection for the hopes and dreams and plans you thought were dead and buried. I know, in the midst of your hurt, your despair, your disappointment, you just forgot who you are dealing with. Remember this is Jesus we're talking about, the Son of the Living God. Remember Jesus' question. "Who is it you are looking for?" Who are you seeking today? A crucified man, dead and buried, or a risen Savior and Lord, ready to change your life and your circumstances? I'm looking for a risen Savior, a living Lord!

Consider too, they came to carry out a burial ritual. Luke said they prepared the spices but waited and rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. Now they've come to the tomb to carry out the ritual preparation of the body on that Sunday morning, Easter Sunday.

You may have come to church on this Easter Sunday as a type of ritual. It's what's expected of you. "It's what I was raised to do, to go to church on Easter and Christmas." Whatever the reason, I'm glad you came, but don't let the ritual blind you to the miracle of the resurrection.

Imagine if the ladies had prepared the spices, came to the tomb, saw the stone rolled away and had simply gone home, disappointed they couldn't carry out their burial ritual, or feeling satisfied that they had at least tried to do their duty. They would have missed the reality, the substance, the best part! They would have missed the miracle!

Some of us come fulfilling the obligations of ritual without recognizing and experiencing the best part, the miracle of the resurrection. We miss recognizing and experiencing Jesus. "I go to church, but I don't know what for. It's just what I'm supposed to do."

What are you looking for? The God of ritual, the God who only exists in religious imagery, the God on the crucifix or in some work of art? Or are you looking for and expecting

to discover the Risen Christ who meets you at the point of your greatest need? He will meet you where you are. This is about more than religion, more than ritual, this is about resurrection and a risen Savior. Christ is risen and everything has changed. Who or what are you looking for?

The second question is asked by the angels. **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Luke 24:5** We aren’t just asking who you are looking for, but consider where you are looking or we can ask, “why are you looking over there?” Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Why are you looking for life here? After all, this is a cemetery.

It’s amazing isn’t it, the places we go looking for answers for our life? Smart, educated, logical, sophisticated, but then we search for the living among the dead. “It’s where everyone I know goes for answers.” Really? We look to the broken system and ideology of the world for answers instead of looking to Jesus and his word? We turn to celebrities to give us direction on how to live, how to look, how to resolve relationship problems. Seriously? We are looking for the living among the dead! We are looking for life in the decaying mess of a sin saturated world.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of our foolishness in looking for life in the wrong places. In Isaiah 44:15-20 he tells of the person who cuts down a tree and with part of it he builds a fire and warms himself and he bakes some bread for food and then the prophet says, **“From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘Save me; you are my god.’” Isaiah 44:17.** He writes, **“No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, ‘Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?’ Isaiah 44: 19** The prophet then wisely observes, **“He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’” Isaiah 44:20**

Many make the same mistake. We look for life in all the wrong places. We expect to find life in things that are dead. We desire things that decay in our hands. We feed on ashes. We follow a deluded heart. We expect to find purpose and meaning in life in our possessions but Jesus said a man’s life doesn’t consist of the treasures or possessions he has. We ignore the reality of eternity and value pleasure above all else but the bible says pleasure only lasts for a season. We look for salvation in people but people let us down and disappoint us. We look for satisfaction in sexual encounters, but sex outside of God’s plan and design, outside of the covenant of marriage is empty, often painful or dangerous in its consequences.

Why look for life in the rubble, in the ashes, in the garbage dump of life? Life can only be found in the giver of life. Jesus said, **“I am the Way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6**

Why look for the living among the dead? Why go looking for life in a world that is dying in sin? Why look for answers in a world whose values are upside down, where good is called evil and evil is called good. You can't find life in a culture that celebrates death. You can't trust a culture where lies are honored as truth, where as Isaiah said, no one can say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?” The world has turned itself upside down, rebelled against God's order and design, rejected God's offer of salvation and is headed to hell, and yet we keep thinking we will find answers and life there. Why look for life among the dead? You'll end up feeding on ashes, living in spiritual squalor, when you were born and raised to be a child of the king.

Jesus said the Devil came to kill, steal and destroy but Jesus came to give us life, even life more abundantly. He came to give himself as the sacrifice to die in our place so we could have that life. The bible says, **“He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21.** He took your place on the cross, bore your sins and my sins in his own flesh, endured the wrath of God against sin for us so we can know forgiveness and have life and peace. He died so we could live!

Why look for the living among the dead? Come to the giver of life, the sustainer of life. Come to life himself. Come to Jesus. Look to Him, turn to him, trust in him. I'm telling you, the world has no answers to the real questions and problems of life. Jesus does. Rebelling against or running from God and the truth is not a solution, but running to Jesus is. Why look for the living among the dead? If you want to really live, come to the giver of life. Come to Jesus.

The third question is simply, **“What did you expect to find?”** If you come home to Jesus, to experience this risen, living Lord, what do you expect to find? Look at John 20.

Three years the twelve disciples had spent with Jesus, trying to understand who he was and what it was all about. Three years to get ready, to prepare. Three years of pledging their allegiance to the teacher they came to believe was the Messiah and more than that, the Son of the Living God. Three years of confessing their loyalty even to death and then what happened on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday?

They slept through his greatest agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. They scattered when the soldiers came to arrest him. Peter denied Jesus, swearing that he didn't even know

him. It was hardly their finest hour. How could they ever face Jesus again?

Now, on Sunday evening, frightened that the Jewish leaders might want to kill them as well and put an end to this whole “Jesus episode”, the disciples have huddled together. Max Lucado said, “their most courageous act was to get up and lock the door.”

Earlier in the day Mary had told them she had seen the risen Lord. They thought she was hysterical with grief and just imagining things. They may have wanted to believe it but it seemed so incredulous. “But then, what if he is alive? What will he say to us after the way we deserted him and denied him? What will he do to us?”

What would you expect his response to be? “Way to go guys. Way to stand with a brother! What a bunch of cowards. Hey Peter, Mister ‘everyone else may forsake you but not me, I’ll be with you even if I have to die with you.’ Way to take a stand. Afraid of a little servant girl.”

What do you expect to find when you come to Jesus? Look at what John tells us. He was an eyewitness. **“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you!’”**
John 20:19-21

In spite of their failure, Jesus said only one thing to them. “Peace be with you.” He said the one thing they didn’t have and desperately needed. Frightened, confused, not knowing what to do and Jesus shows up with the one thing only Jesus can supply: Peace. Forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, acceptance, it’s all a part of that rich gift of peace.

Thomas wasn’t there when Jesus appeared to them but a week later they were together again and Thomas was with them this time and Jesus came and stood among them. To Thomas he said it as well, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “You need proof. Here, put your finger here. Touch me and see that I’m not a ghost and that I am alive. Here, touch the nail prints in my hands. Put your hand in the hole in my side where the spear entered.” And then Jesus said, **“Stop doubting and believe.” John 20:27**

What do you expect to find if you come to Jesus? A lecture about your past life and the mistakes you’ve made? Condemnation for your failures? A list of rules and rituals to follow? How about life? John wrote in his gospel, **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the**

presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31

What do you expect to find if you come to Jesus? Let me tell you: You’ll find life. Stop doubting and believe! Thomas, in response to Jesus words said, “My Lord and My God!” Thomas believed and by believing he found life in his name. Jesus said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” That’s us. We haven’t seen him as Thomas did, but we know he is risen, we know he is the Christ, the Son of God. We know he is the one who died for us on the cross and who rose again. We know he has invited us to come to him, to believe and to receive life. It’s time to stop doubting and take that step of faith and believe. It’s time to surrender your life to Jesus.

What do you expect to find if you come to Jesus? Why not hear it from Jesus himself. **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30**

Who or what are you looking for? Life? The life giver? That’s Jesus! Looking for forgiveness, a new start? You’ll find that when you surrender your life to Jesus. He’s not looking to make it harder for you, he is looking to give you life and peace and rest.

Where are you looking? You’ve been searching, but in all the wrong places, looking to the wrong sources. Stop looking for the living among the dead. Look to Jesus, the risen Savior and Lord. Stop doubting and believe upon him. Stop running from him and run to him.

What do you expect to find? I can tell you, you will find salvation, hope, peace, forgiveness, and rest for your soul! You will find Jesus, the risen Savior and Lord. He has been waiting to give you eternal life. Will you accept his invitation and come to him today?