

Dear Fellow Redeemed, and Fellow Resurrected:

Where do you go when you look to buy an automobile? I am sure that of all the options and all the places you can think of to look to purchase an automobile, the last place you would look is in a junkyard. Most people, unless you are one of those rare people whose hobby is restoring old cars, don't go to the junkyard. You either go to a car dealer, or answer an ad in the paper, or buy a car from a friend you trust. But you do not find a road-worthy, running automobile in a junkyard.

What do you do when you find that car that catches your eye? Do you feel the leather and kick the tires? Do you take a good sniff of that "new car" smell? Do you test drive it to see how it handles and how the steering feels in your hands? Do you listen to the sounds of the engine? No doubt you've done some research beforehand and maybe have experience with another product built by that manufacturer. And, I'm sure, you ask the seller questions and listen to the answers.

In essence, you look in the right places and you let your senses assist you in determining whether the car sitting before you is the right one or not. In this morning's Gospel lesson the senses of the women at the tomb site of Jesus also assist these ladies in realizing the full impact of what happened that first Easter Sunday—the Lord has risen! This Lenten season we looked at the theme, "Who do you say I am?" This morning, then, we say "You are the Risen One" as we ponder the question the angels asked the ladies, "**Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?**" With the women, let us:

1. *Look—The tomb is empty!*
2. *Hear—He Has Risen! and*
3. *Remember—What He Had Spoken!*

Luke first of all sets the scene for us. It was the day right after the Sabbath, the first day of the week, Sunday to us. It was early in the morning, in fact just as dawn is breaking. There probably was very little light, the birds just started singing. What Luke is saying is that these women are coming at the first possible moment to properly dress the body of Christ for burial, which they did not have time to do on Friday as the Sabbath was fast approaching. The spices had been prepared and the women now bring them to place with the body.

Coming to the grave, they find the tomb open with the stone rolled away. This in itself wouldn't surprise the women. Since a Jew would be considered ceremonial unclean by touching a dead body, someone who died on the Sabbath likely would not be buried until the early Sunday dawn. This would also prevent doing work on the Sabbath. And graves often were used for generations of families, housing the remains of cousins and other distant relatives. The stone rolled away in itself was no cause for alarm.

But what was cause for alarm is the scene inside the tomb. It was empty! In fact, even the one body that should be there wasn't! As if that weren't disconcerting enough, suddenly two men dressed in bright clothes suddenly appear. And they ask the question that is our theme this morning: **"Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?"**

With the women we, too, need to *Look—the Tomb is Empty*. First of all, we need to look at the tomb. There is only one purpose for a tomb—to bury the dead. Inside tombs are bodies that are stiff and motionless. Inside tombs are bodies that do not have breath. Inside tombs are bodies that have the stench of death—a stench that living people seek to avoid. Thus the spices the ladies bring—to alleviate the stench of death.

Looking at tombs and their contents, we ask ourselves, "Why death?" We often ask this question in various ways. Just this last week we've remembered the events of Oklahoma City and Columbine High School. We remember the devastating consequences of sin—sin that is self-serving, sin that makes mankind rebellious against God, sin that leads only to death. We turn our attention from the horrific events in Oklahoma City and Littleton, Colorado, to our own lives. We see the many areas evident to us in our lives where we do not follow the will of God in our lives. We have our pet sins, our bad habits, and our addictions that are a stench in God's nostrils. How apt the crowd on Good Friday accepted the blame for Jesus death—they and their children! For we all are responsible for Jesus death. For he died for every one of our sins!

Thus, while the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life! Jesus death, which we observed three days ago, pays for our many sins, the one sacrifice for all, as we saw in our Sunday theme these last six weeks. **"He who had no sin became sin for us; the righteous for the unrighteous."** Thus we look, not only at the cross, but also at the empty tomb, which tells us: **"Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Hallelujah!"**

The women could not only see that the tomb was empty, but they could also feel the empty, cold stone. They could feel the folded burial linen and the emptiness therein. They could smell that death did not reside in that tomb, for the one body it had contained **"did not see decay."** The taste of death was missing from that tomb.

The women were asked: **"Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?"** The angels also spoke to them this word: **"Hear—He Has Risen!"** The angels answered what must have been on the minds of the women—where is he? What has happened? What is the meaning of all this? The angels answered: "He is not here. He is risen. Remember what he told you." The women, it must be noted, weren't alone in their bewilderment. The disciples traveling to Emmaus walked back to Emmaus with long faces and downcast spirits. The Twelve, or what remained and was assembled of them, were hiding behind locked doors! Thomas needed tactile proof that what his fellow disciples saw was real. To each, Jesus showed himself and spoke.

Even today, we need to hear this message. For Jesus' resurrection is important to our lives this year, in 2000. We, too, need to hear again that Jesus rose from the dead. We need to hear that that resurrection means death is defeated and has no power over us. We

need to hear that Jesus' resurrection is God's clear message that Jesus' payment for all our sins is complete, final, and full. Paul himself writes to the Corinthians: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." We have new life in the resurrected Christ—new life here on earth and eternal life with our heavenly Father!

The angels also had one final message for the women when they asked: "Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?" They reminded the women, "Remember—What He Has Spoken!" Certainly the Jewish leaders remembered—remember they wanted the tomb secure and guarded by soldiers! The angels reminded the women what they should remember: "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" While the disciples and other followers were expecting a mighty warrior king to free them from Roman oppression, the angels remind the women that Jesus' true mission as a warrior king was to defeat the forces of sin, death, and Satan.

Jesus made this very clear even to his disciples! Remember a few weeks ago, Jesus told his disciples what would happen in the coming weeks. Peter, of course, spoke his mind and said, "Never, Lord!" But Jesus rebuked Peter, because Peter did not have in mind the things of God. And the things of God are to pay the price necessary to rescue each one of us from sin, death, and Satan. Now, death has no sting. Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, sin no longer controls us. Now, Satan is powerless. As Luther wrote in one of our hymns, "One little word can fell him."

We rejoice and we praise our Lord this joyous festival day because this resurrection is more than just a dead body rising up and walking out of the grave. It is a king, mighty and victorious in battle, marching forth to show that we are redeemed and rescued by the God of heaven! Hallelujah! Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Before we leave the empty tomb, let us again take in this scene and experience it with our senses. *Look—The tomb is empty!* Touch the stone and empty clothes. Smell the air untainted by death's corruption. *Hear—He Has Risen!* He is victorious! We, too, have new life and our bodies will also rise from the dead! Finally *Remember—What He has Spoken!* He has fulfilled His promises to die in our place, defeat sin, death and Satan, and rise victorious from the grave! Remember His Promise that He loves you and has forgiven all your sin! Remember that he knows every inch of your being, every thought, word, and deed. Remember that He has selected you as His own from before the beginning of the earth. We walk away from that empty tomb knowing that He is alive and not among the dead. We walk knowing that death, for us, is only a rest until our Lord comes again in glory.

Amen.