

Shepherd's Staff

April 2024

We gather to worship, we go to serve our Lord.

"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth!"

Parkersburg Christian Reformed Church

Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m. ~ Church School 10:45 a.m

Easter Sunday: Surprised by Good News!

Source: <https://www.fellowshipreformed.org/sermons/2017/4/19/easter-sunday-surprised-by-good-news>

When the women arrived at the cemetery on that first Easter morning and found the tomb empty, to say that they were surprised would be a major understatement.

Amazed. Astonished. Bewildered. Confused. Even scared.

That's more like it.

We may have all showed up this morning ready to exclaim, "Christ is Risen!" and sing our old-time favorites like "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," and hear the good, old story about the empty tomb, but not those dear women...nor the rest of the disciples.

Let's just be clear. In order to grasp the amazement of Easter morning, the shocking surprise of the empty tomb, you must realize this: on that "first day of the week at early dawn" that Luke tells us about, *no one was expecting Jesus to rise from the dead.*



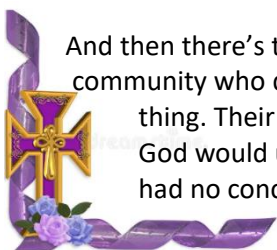
But wait, you say. Should it really have been that much of a surprise? After all, don't the two men in dazzling clothes, presumably angels, sort of scold the women for not knowing this would happen? "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

The angels were right. Jesus had told them this is how it would all unfold. Not just once but three times. Spelled it out pretty clearly. First back in Luke 9:21-22, then again in 9:44-45, and a third time even, right before Holy Week, in 18:31-34. He didn't talk in some Rabbinic-Jedi code. No puzzling riddles. This was plain talk. Straightforward and direct. So why are they so surprised? Each time Jesus foretold his death and resurrection, Luke tells us that the disciples (including these women) "understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."

Not because they weren't smart. Not because they weren't paying attention. But because this whole idea that the Messiah—the long-awaited Savior who would rescue Israel from Roman oppression and the whole world with it—would suffer, die and rise again was completely foreign. It didn't fit one bit within their mental framework of what the Messiah would be like.

First of all, the Messiah was coming to conquer, not be conquered. With the strength of a warrior or the political savvy of a diplomat, he would overthrow the bad guys, not be overthrown. But to be handed over to suffer—and to suffer in the worst possible way—the shame of a Roman Cross. Well, the Torah seemed clear that such a one was cursed by God. A suffering, dead Messiah was just another failed messiah, and history had handed down plenty of those.

And then there's the whole "rise from the dead three days later" thing. While there were some among the Jewish community who didn't believe in a resurrection of the dead (namely, the Sadducees), most did. But here's the thing. Their understanding of the resurrection of the dead was that it would happen at the end of time, when God would usher in his new creation, and it would happen all at once. Everyone at the same time. What they had no concept of was that one person would be resurrected in the middle of time!



So of course, they didn't grasp it when Jesus warned them that this is how it would go. That's why they are so surprised, so astonished and bewildered and confused when they discover the empty tomb and hear the angels' message. It was the last thing in the world that they were expecting. And here they are, grasped by the terrifying and glorious surprise of it all!

But maybe that's the point of Easter. Not so much that we are able to fully grasp it—to fully understand it in all its mystery and wonder—but that *we are grasped* by it! What if the point is not that we are able to fully comprehend Easter but that our lives are fully apprehended by the love and power of the God who raised Jesus from the dead? God is bringing about new creation—that's what the empty tomb means—and now we are drawn into it and transformed by it! In the words of Deitrich Bonhoeffer: "Bewilderment is true comprehension."



That leads to the second big surprise in the story. The fact that these women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (and the other women with them)—are the first ones grasped by the surprise of Easter and recipients of the Good News! They are the first ones to experience the dawn of God's New Creation! They get a front row seat! They, of all people!

These women were dear friends of Jesus, part of his inner circle, had been with him since Galilee. But this is a patriarchal world, and women were among those on the margins—without influence, privilege, and power. And yet here they are, being grasped by this new thing God is doing and pulled into the center of resurrection action!

Luke tells us that when the angels make the announcement, "Then they remembered his words..." *Then they remembered his [Jesus'] words...* But not just in the sense of recalling something they had forgotten. Like I said, these women are surprised because they just didn't understand what Jesus was saying...then. But now, in light of Easter, something is changing. Something jumps in them, something comes alive! God was at work not only opening the tomb but opening their minds and helping them to begin to understand what they previously didn't.

One definition of remember is to "put back together the pieces" after something has been dismembered. Certainly, their world, in the tragic wake of the crucifixion, had been dismembered. But now, they were putting the pieces together in their memory—for the first time beginning to see clearly! It's less an "Oh, yeah, now I remember..." and more like an "Aha—now I'm starting to see it!" What had looked like a failed mission was turning out to be the fulfillment of God's plan!



And in the act of remembering, it's as if the same power that raised Jesus from the grave was at work *remembering* them—putting the broken pieces of their lives back together, their shattered hopes and busted up dreams and broken hearts. God was taking them as they are and mending them, making them new and whole.

This is what God can do for each of us, in the power of Christ's resurrection. He takes the broken pieces of our own lives, the debris of shattered relationships, busted up dreams and dead hopes. He takes each of us, as we are, and goes to work mending us, healing us, forgiving us, making us new. Making us whole again. Making us alive.

And all of this leads to one more big surprise in this story of the first Easter. The news that Jesus has been raised, yes, shocking. The fact that these women were the first ones to discover the empty tomb, to experience God's new world being born. But even more, it's these women who are sent as the first unlikely witnesses to share this news with the disciples and the rest of the world.



In being grasped by the good news of resurrection, and remembering Jesus' words, the women at the first Easter are now sent to be the first witnesses to tell this news to the world.

They are such unlikely witnesses! In the ancient world, women were not considered to be credible witnesses in the court of law. Many have pointed out that one of the reasons we can trust the witness of the gospels is that they leave this rather embarrassing detail of the story in—that the first witnesses of Easter were women. If you wanted to make an airtight argument for your case, you would have done better to brush this up—leave this part out or change some details

to make it more credible. But all the gospel writers leave this important detail in—because it is most likely how it actually happened.

It's one of the things I love most about Luke's gospel. We've seen him from the beginning show that Jesus was really about drawing in those on the margins and bringing them to the center. Taking outcasts and folks who don't fit in or have power or privilege and assigning them star roles in the unfolding drama of God's mission. Who is it that is present at the first announcement of Jesus' birth and called to go deliver the news? Lowly shepherds. And who is it that is at the first announcement of Jesus' resurrection and sent to be heralds of this good news? Women who were without privilege and power.

So it is with us! As those who have been grasped by this good news, we are now empowered and sent to be unlikely witnesses—to help the world remember who God intends it to be, and to be a part of the Spirit's work of helping the world be *remembered*—put back together, healed, made whole. This is our calling—personally and all together as God's people.

The truth is, it's a Good Friday world. But Easter happens in a Good Friday world! The surprising, bewildering, glorious good news of Easter is that the risen Jesus is on the move to set it all right, heal it, restore it, make it new. To bring life out of death. Light out of darkness. Hope out of despair. Yes, it's a Good Friday world, but we join the women at the empty tomb and are being transformed into an Easter People!

So hear the angels' announcement today—whether for the first time or the hundredth—the surprising Good News that grasps ahold of us and sends us into the world:

"Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen. Remember...remember...remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again!"

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed!



A-P Food Pantry Needs You!

The Aplington-Parkersburg Food Pantry provides a large food supplement to approximately 100 families within our communities the third Saturday of each month and April is our church's month to assist with distribution. The pantry needs 8 volunteers from our church on Saturday, April 20, from 7:00-9:30 a.m. at the Parkersburg Civic Center. Please let Jan Johnson, Marcia Allspach, or Angie Meester know if you are able to help. We look forward to seeing you then!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
4/4 Kevin Meester
4/5 Shelly Meester
4/8 Mary Johnson
4/10 Michael Allspach
4/22 Paul Bruns

Let's
Celebrate

HAPPY Anniversary
4/30 Rollyn & Kathy DeGroot



Do you have anything you'd like included in the newsletter? Email the information to wendymmulder@hotmail.com by the 20th of the month.





Spring



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BLOSSOM

BUGS

BUNNY

BUTTERFLY

CALF

CATERPILLAR

CHICKS

FLOWERS

FROG

GARDEN

GRASS

HATCH

INSECTS

LADYBUG

LAMB

NATURE

NEST

RABBIT

ROBIN

SNAIL

SPRING

SPROUT

TULIP

WORM

