

Luke 24:1-12

On that first Easter morning, the women were skipping happily to the tomb. Upon seeing the stone rolled away and Jesus' body not there, they said to themselves, "Of course He's not here; He has risen!" When the two angels appeared, these women were happy to see them. They exchanged greetings and high fives. Upon returning to the apostles, they all sang Easter hymns, had an Easter breakfast, and then enjoyed an Easter egg hunt. It was such a wonderful day!

Yeah, right. That first Easter was pretty much the exact opposite of this. They went in grief and sadness to the tomb. They were perplexed and confused upon seeing things the way they were. The two angels frightened them. When they returned to the apostles, these men called their story nonsense; an idle tale, and they refused to believe.

Well I, for one, am glad that God had St. Luke record the Easter story for us exactly the way it was. He didn't embellish it. He didn't paint happy faces on all the characters. There was no Easter joy on Easter. There were no exchanges of "He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" And there was no faith in the Risen Christ.

All of this came later, but it took awhile. It took patience on God's part. It took His mercy and grace. And it took the work of the Holy Spirit through the Easter message in the hearts of those who heard.

All of these men and women did come to believe. They lived their faith in the Risen Lord Jesus, and a number of them died for their faith. But that morning; that Easter morning no one was ready to sing Easter hymns. No one was ready to live for Christ. And no one was ready to die for Him.

And so no matter who you are, and no matter where you've been in life, and what is in your heart right now, there is a place for you here in the story of Easter. Whether you have sadness and grief, confusion, or fright, are filled with doubts, or have anything in between, God wants you to know that the story of Easter is for you, too.

You see, I don't think it really works for us to live day in and day out, with all the troubles life throws at us, with all the guilt we feel in our heart, with all the sadness, concern, and everything else, but then on Easter morning we come to church, sing Easter hymns, hear the Easter message that we hear every year, and suddenly life is good. We may act as if life is wonderful today, but tomorrow is another day; the start of another week filled with temptations to sin, troubles, sickness, perhaps death itself.

I'm not trying to burst your Easter bubble this morning, but there has to be more to Easter than just getting up early one Sunday each Spring and having a wonderful day. And there is.

We're kind of the exact opposite of all those men and women who were part of that first Easter. Their Easter Sunday was just awful, but the rest of their life was wonderful. Our Easter Sunday is wonderful, but the rest of our year, maybe of our life, may not go so well.

If that's so, something is missing. Jesus is missing. That's why Easter Sunday, for them, was so sad, confusing, frightening, and just plain terrible. Jesus was missing. He wasn't there in the tomb. And so they were perplexed. The angels said that He had risen, but they were slow to believe. When Jesus is

missing, there is no point to life. Not for us who know better. And they knew better back then. They were with Jesus every day. But then He was nailed to a cross and He died. He was gone from their life. And now even His body was missing.

Today is Easter Sunday and it's wonderful because Jesus is not missing. "He is risen!" We hear it and we believe it. He is not missing because He is right here with us. He is the Word of God coming into your ears. His body is not missing. He gives it to you, with His blood, in the Sacrament on the altar. We have Easter joy today because we are here with Jesus and He is here with us.

But what good is Easter; what good is the Risen Christ, if He goes missing after today? There is so much more to Easter than having a wonderful day. Because, here's the thing - Easter is amazingly wonderful even if your day, or your whole life, is awful.

Your God does not abandon you in your sadness and grief. He does not leave you to deal with your troubles, and guilt, and your doubts. He comes into your life through Him who died on the cross for you.

Now there is Law here at the cross, and we need to hear it. When Peter told them on Pentecost that they had crucified the Lord of Glory, it cut them to the heart. How, then, can we pass our sins off as no big deal? You put your God on a cross, and so did I. We must repent.

If you missed the Good Friday service, plan on coming next year. No one can truly appreciate Easter without first going to the cross through Lent and Holy Week. The wonder of Easter did not come cheap. For God to rise, He first had to suffer and die. You cannot be Christians if all you want to be are Easter Christians. There is no Easter without the cross of Good Friday. Your Baptism doesn't just make you Easter Christians because in Baptism you die and you rise with Christ. We die to sin in Baptism through repentance, and are raised up with Jesus by the power of His resurrection.

Those who were here on Friday heard that the reason why there is no benediction at the conclusion of the Good Friday service is because the service does not end until Easter morning. Good Friday and Easter are one service. Death and resurrection belong together, for Jesus and for you.

Good Friday is for you because your God died out of love for you, and you are forgiven. Whatever guilt or fear is in your heart, there is no need for it. Every one of you is forgiven. Every sin is forgiven. Jesus died for all of it. He died for all of you.

And Easter is for you because the risen life in Christ starts now. If death is defeated, and it is, then so is the power of sin and Satan. Jesus is not missing; He is here for you. He empowers you to live as His Christian. Whether you have a wonderful life ahead of you or not, you have a Risen Lord who will never leave you nor forsake you. He had a place for your sins on His cross. Now He has a place for you in the story of His resurrection. And so have a blessed Easter today and always! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.