

You have heard of brides who have been stood up at the altar, the groom failing to show up. But have you ever heard of someone who was stood up at a funeral? The one not showing up being the one in the coffin. The bride who is stood up would surely be upset with the groom. But how could the mourners at a funeral be upset? Confused? Yes. Anxious? Yes! But upset? Maybe with the funeral director, but not with the one who has died.

And so we see three women in our Easter text who come to the tomb at early dawn for a funeral. Jesus' funeral. They have come with spices to embalm His body. But the lid of the coffin has been removed and rolled away, and the body of Jesus is not inside. They are dumbfounded. "*Perplexed*" it says. And if they are upset, it could hardly be that they are upset with the body of Jesus, though perhaps with whoever it is that took His body from the tomb.

But lo and behold, two angels, who appear as men, stand next to these women. And they tell them not to be perplexed or upset, that everything is as it should be. The reason, they say, why the body of Jesus is not there is because it is not a funeral. "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" they ask. "Why would you come as mourners to a funeral when the one who is supposedly in the coffin is not dead, but very much alive?"

You have not come here this morning as mourners coming to a funeral. You come believing the words of the angel that Jesus has risen from the dead. The way you are dressed, the hymns you sing, your very demeanor are more in keeping with a wedding celebration than a funeral. Indeed, anyone seeking the body of Jesus lying in a coffin would be stood up.

So then, you are the bride standing here at the altar. And the world out there laughs at you. "Where is the groom?" they mock. They even quote the words of the angels on that Easter morning who said to the women, "*He is not here.*" "Jesus has left you standing by yourself at the altar," says the world mockingly. For the world does not believe that Jesus is alive.

And as bad as that is, consider this, that there are Christians in the world who do believe He is alive, yet still that He is not here. He is in heaven but not here with us, they say. The Groom is here in spirit only, but He Himself with His flesh and blood, is confined to heaven.

But then Easter is practically meaningless. For such Christians need only a dead Jesus and not a living Lord. They need Good Friday but not Easter Sunday. If Jesus is not here with us in His very flesh and blood, then we are, as a bride, stood up at the altar. And then it is pointless to gather here at the altar on Easter or on any given Sunday. We can worship Jesus from the place of our own choosing. And many do. For if the Groom is not here at the altar, why should the bride bother to be here?

Oh, but He is here. For His body, being raised from the dead and glorified, is not confined to just one place. And according to His promise, when you gather here for worship, and at the altar for Holy Communion, your Groom is here with you. Being resurrected, His spirit and body are no longer separated as when He died on Good Friday, but they are always joined together. And so, in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Sacrament your Groom gives you His resurrected flesh and blood. His life into your body to join you with Him in the resurrected life.

On Easter morning the angels asked the women a profound question. “*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*” Jesus is the living One who is alive evermore. And because He lives, and is the One who gives life, He seeks the dead among the living. He seeks His sheep who are lost. He seeks His children, baptized into His death and resurrection, and who, like the Prodigal Son, need to be returned. Jesus is the Groom who has been left standing at the altar. His beloved bride is nowhere to be seen.

But He is not angry with His bride. He loves His bride dearly. In fact, He gave up His life for His bride. And He seeks her and invites her to join Him here at the altar.

He seeks you, my friend. For who of us does not need to be sought? Who of us lives so perfectly that we do not need to be resurrected from the death of sin? Yes, resurrected. We do not simply need to be reformed. We need to be resurrected. We need Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life, not just when our bodies will be laid into the grave one day. But even now, and especially now, so that our loved ones can lay our bodies into the grave with confidence and hope. We need more than a dead Savior. We need a living Lord to be present with us now in His resurrected flesh and blood to raise us up now out of our sins, forgive us, and give to us His resurrected life.

And this, Jesus does as your Groom here at the altar. He never leaves you standing here by yourself. He is always here with you and for you. He is not here to scold you. He is here with forgiveness for you. Real forgiveness for your real sins.

And there isn't one of you here today who is left out because your sins are too many or too awful, or because you have left your Groom standing here by Himself for too long a time. He declares each and everyone of you forgiven. This is what your baptism means for you every single day. And right here in your baptism is the resurrected life of Jesus for you.

You are His beloved bride. Today is Easter. It is a wedding celebration. Your wedding with Christ. Amen.