

The resurrection of Jesus Christ ought to make you marvel at what God has done. But instead of marveling at the resurrection, we are tempted to do all sorts of other things, as we see here in Luke 24: When the women did not find the body of Jesus, they didn't marvel; they *were perplexed*, and started a search. They thought: "Jesus is dead. This is where dead people are. The body must be here somewhere." Most of the apostles, when they heard about the empty tomb, didn't marvel; they thought that it was an idle tale and *ignored* it. Their actions, or rather, inaction, said: "It cannot be true, because dead people don't come back. This story is not even worth looking into." But Peter shows us how to respond. When he heard that Christ had been raised from the dead, he *ran to the tomb*, and when he saw that Jesus was gone but the graveclothes weren't, he *marveled*.

We can find each of these three responses to the proclamation of the resurrection in our culture today. The first thing we should learn, then, is that while we as Christians we believe this doctrine as the central truth of the Christian faith, it is a hard doctrine to accept. It has never been easy to believe that a dead man can rise again, and so we should expect people to have trouble believing it. We need to be prepared to be patient in proclaiming and explaining and clarifying and correcting and reminding people that Jesus Christ really died, He really was buried, and He really did rise from the dead on the third day, not as a ghost or a spirit or an idea, but as a flesh and blood man.

And so as we look at the reactions that we see in our text, I also want us to take a look at our own reactions, because even though we confess this truth with our lips, sometimes our lives reveal that we've forgotten how to marvel. Sometimes the resurrection simply perplexes us, and far too often, we live our lives as if the resurrection is just silly story that we can safely ignore.

Looking at the response of the women who went to anoint Jesus' body for burial, we see that they had expectations about Jesus that were not fulfilled. They were *perplexed* when Jesus wasn't where they thought He would be. This isn't the first time that Jesus hasn't been where people expected Him to be, though. Nobody expected a king to be born in a stable. Nobody expected a twelve year old boy to be discussing theology in the temple. Nobody expected a faithful Jew to be eating with prostitutes and sinners. Nobody expected Jesus to minister to Samaritans or Gentiles. Nobody expected Israel's Messiah to end up on a cross.

The funny thing is, though, that in every case, Jesus is surprised that we are surprised! "Didn't you know that I would be about my Father's business?" "It isn't healthy people who need a doctor, but sick." And in Luke 18:31-33, Jesus told His disciples exactly what would happen in Jerusalem, and He told them that it had to be this way in order to fulfill what the prophets had written about the Son of Man.

And so when the two shining angels surprise the women at the tomb, their words are a bit of a rebuke as well: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. *Remember how He told you*, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

Jesus is not an inherently mysterious inscrutable figure, whose actions don't make any sense. In fact, all it takes to make sense of Jesus, and to avoid being perplexed about where He is, who He's with, and what He's doing is to *listen* to His words and *remember* them.

So for those of us who believe, when we *think* we know what Jesus will do: heal us, give us a happy marriage, a good life, and so on, what we should be doing is remembering His words: in this world you will have trouble. Whenever we forget Jesus' words, we're perplexed by what He does or where He goes. We find ourselves asking “God, what's going on? Why is this happening? What are you doing?” And in that perplexity, many people have gone on to turn away from Jesus. It's not uncommon to hear people who have left the faith say that Jesus didn't come through for them. He wasn't there for them. They looked for Him, but didn't find Him.

But what is really going on is that they have forgotten what Jesus said. They try to fit Jesus into their own story, instead of finding their place in His story. Jesus is not a character in the story of *you*, and if you think that He is, you will end up perplexed. So if you are going through a difficult time, and Jesus isn't where you thought He would be, the first thing you need to do is remember what He said: “I will never leave you or forsake you.” If you look around and can't find Jesus, it isn't because He left you. When you are perplexed because you can't find Jesus, it's probably because you are somewhere that you shouldn't be, because you've forgotten His words.

But for those who don't believe, maybe you're also wondering why Jesus isn't where you think He ought to be. If Jesus really is who He claims to be, for example, why are His followers such a mess? If Jesus were really there, Christians wouldn't be so mean, or judgmental, or spend so much time fighting and bickering with each other. Maybe you looked for Jesus at church, and you didn't find Him!

But you, too, need to remember what He said. Jesus spent a lot of time with stuck-up religious people, too. He loves religious sinners just as much as He loves prodigal sinners. Jesus' own disciples spent years with Him, and still forgot some of the most important things He ever said. Two of the biggest parts of Jesus' ministry were *exposing religious hypocrisy* and *patiently instructing people who just didn't get it*. So if you look at the church and see a *mess* instead of *Jesus*, don't worry. That's why He came.

If you look for Jesus through your pre-conceived idea of where He ought to be, you won't find Him, and you'll end up perplexed. If you can't find Jesus, it isn't because *He's* in the wrong place. It's because you're looking in the wrong place.

We are confused so often when Jesus isn't where we expect Him to be. But we need to think about this: what if Jesus had been where the women had expected Him to be? In our crisis, we think that it would be better if Jesus was where we wanted to find Him. But on that Sunday morning, it would not have been *better* for these women if they had found Jesus in the tomb. They wouldn't be perplexed, *but Jesus would be dead!*

So realize this: whenever Jesus isn't where you *thought* He would be, when He isn't where you *want* Him to be, *it's because He's somewhere better!* This is what it means when the angels say: “He is not here; but has risen.” He's not where you expected; He's somewhere *better*. When Jesus doesn't show up where you want Him to, believe that He's somewhere better; and not somewhere better for *Him*; somewhere better for *you*.

That was how the women reacted to the empty tomb. They were perplexed, until they remembered Jesus' words. But the apostles are even worse! The women at least start searching, and end up as the first evangelists. (Ladies, moms, think about that: it was women doing women's work that became the first evangelists. Don't ever think that your calling as a woman, a wife, or a mother is keeping you from serving God. Expect God to use your calling to put you into position to speak for Him.)

But the apostles dismissed the report as an idle tale, fevered ramblings, crazy talk. And so they *ignore* the Resurrected Lord. And I'd guess that this is the most common response when the resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed: it is rejected out of hand as *unbelievable*, and so those who hear it *do nothing*.

But the mistake the apostles make is a close cousin to the one the women initially made: the women couldn't find Jesus because they started with their own understanding of Jesus, rather than starting with what Jesus Himself said. If you reject the resurrection as crazy talk without even bothering to investigate, it is because you are starting with your own close-minded idea of how the world works, instead of being open to Jesus. But refusing to entertain the idea of resurrection just because you've never seen or heard of such a thing before makes your own brain the final judge. If it doesn't make sense *to you*, it can't be true. But if you think back a few years, using the toilet didn't make sense to you, so I think it might be entirely appropriate to allow that there might be “more in heaven and on earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy.” You cannot fit the world into your head, much less *Jesus*, the one who made the world.

Now, you might be quick to point out that there are many idle tales, many stories that amount to nothing more than wishful thinking. Are Jesus' followers just supposed to believe every crazy story they hear? But the angel's words apply here as well. The reason why the apostles shouldn't have ignored the report about the resurrection is not that they ought to have blind faith in any crazy story. The reason they should have jumped up and run to the tomb along with Peter and John is that *Jesus had told them what was going to happen!* They didn't ignore Jesus because they were thoughtful skeptics with high standards of evidence. They ignored Jesus because they didn't believe His words.

This is the tragedy of those who ignore the resurrection. Sure, they have the odds on their side. What we preach flies in the face of everything we know about humanity, history, and death. Ignoring the story of the resurrection makes complete sense, from a human perspective.

But God doesn't call you to believe in the resurrection because it *makes sense*; He calls you to believe in the resurrection because it is *true*. Don't get lost in the fog of *probabilities*; step into the light of *facts*. Yes, it's wildly, staggeringly, unbelievably improbable. Yes, it flies in the face of everything we know about the science of death. But at the end of the day, those who fixate on probabilities and odds and dismiss the resurrection as an idle tale *are wrong*. On the third day, Jesus walked out of the grave, alive and well.

And so when you stand before the Risen Lord, it won't do any good to tell him that you had good reasons for not believing the stories about Him. He will not be impressed by your critical thinking skills; He will condemn you for your unbelief. When you hear that the tomb is empty, that a dead man is alive again, that Jesus Christ has been raised to life, don't ignore that news. At the very least, be like Peter, and run to the tomb.

Peter shows us the third response. The text doesn't tell us that at the end of his trip to the tomb that he fully *understood and believed*. But it does tell us that he *marveled, and whatever marveling is, it isn't the unbelief that led the others to ignore the report that the women brought*. Did Peter know what had happened? Not for sure, not completely. But he knew that *something amazing* had happened, and since he had been amazed by Jesus so many times before, hope started to rise in his heart, and whether marveling led to believing, or believing led to marveling, or some combination of both all mixed up together, Peter was once more *amazed* by Jesus Christ.

To marvel means to open yourself up to *wonder* and *amazement*. And just like Jesus has been perplexing people from His earliest days, He has also been causing everyone to marvel. When the shepherds first announced the wonders that surrounded Jesus' birth, everyone who hears *marvels*. When Jesus calms the storm, the disciples *marvel*. When Jesus casts out demons, looses the tongue of the mute, and opens the eyes of the blind, the crowds *marvel*.

Marveling at Jesus has been the right response since the day he was born, marveling was the appropriate response when the sun went out at midday and the earth shook on that Friday when Jesus died, and marveling is the right response when Peter looks into the tomb and sees that it is empty.

Marvel: what if it's all true? What if it really happened, just as the angels said, just as the women told us? What if everything bad and sad and wrong and evil in the world is starting to come undone? Look! *The tomb is empty!* Look! *The graveclothes are lying in the corner.* Look! *Jesus isn't here.* What if it's true? I want to believe. I think I'm starting to believe. I believe, Lord, help my unbelief!

On this Easter morning, as we gather in the presence of our Risen Savior, I call upon you to *marvel*:

Marvel, because the seed of the woman crushed the head of the serpent.

Marvel, because God is blessing the world through Abraham's offspring.

Marvel, because God did not allow David's son to see decay.

Marvel, because as Isaiah foretold, He poured out His soul to death as an offering for guilt, wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and yet He shall see His offspring and prolong His days.

Marvel, because every word that He spoke when He said that “the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” every word came true.

Marvel, because sin, Satan, and the schemes of wicked men did their worst, but Jesus Christ overcame them all.

Marvel, because He was dead, but now lives.

Marvel, because the grave is empty.

Marvel, because the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world.

Marvel, because death is swallowed up in victory.

As you hear again the words of the angels: “He is not here; but has risen.” Do not be perplexed. Do not move on with your life like nothing happened. Instead, *marvel*, because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*