

EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 16, 2017

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; LUKE 24:1-12
Remember His Words

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Picture the scene on that first Easter morning. The **disciples** are **hiding**, scared to death that soldiers might still be seeking to spill some blood, that the Temple Police might want to arrest Jesus' followers, that the Lord's enemies might just want to strike again while the iron is still hot...



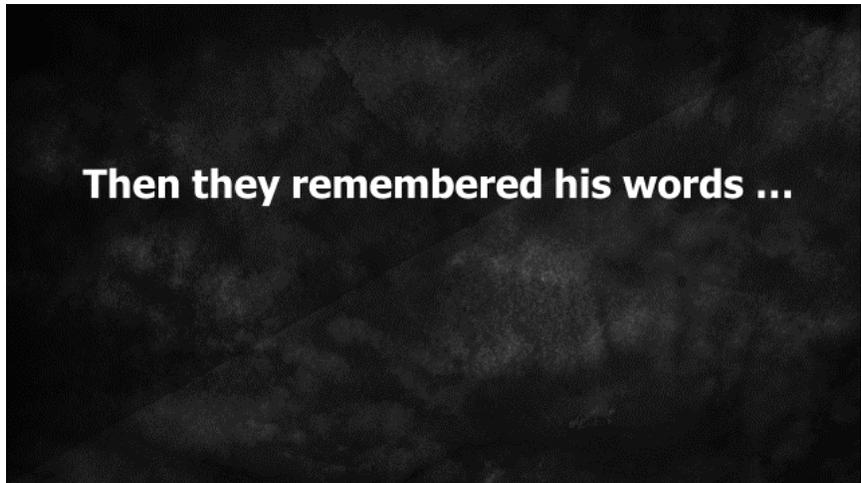
So after a terrible, sleepless night, the women arise to face the cold light of dawn that will surely only make their loss seem worse. Nevertheless, Jesus' body must be prepared for burial, so they set out to do what has to be done.

It's the last – and only – thing (they think!) that's left to do for their Rabbi, their Teacher, this servant of God who died trying to bring about the rule, the reign, the kingdom of God: a community in which **all** people would be blessed with the promise of God's love and grace...

Yet their grief-stricken hearts, numb with pain, are suddenly set to beating overtime when they near the tomb and see that the stone has been rolled away. And as if **that's** not unsettling enough, the women are suddenly surprised to see two **angels** in dazzling white. They **bow** their faces to the ground in **fear**...yet **raise** them when these mysterious messengers speak aloud a **very cryptic quip**: *Why do you look for the **living**...among the **dead**?*

Now, that seems to be something of an **unfair question**, right? I mean, the women watched, with their very own eyes...they saw the whole horrible happening of Jesus' death on the cross...they **know** that **no** human being could ever recover from such terrible trauma...

And yet the angels continue to speak: *He is not here, but has risen. 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.* Now the very **next** words that the Gospel writer Luke shares, are these:



Then they remembered his words ...

Then (the women) remembered Jesus' words...

Music...to the ears of the Almighty...

Salve...to the Savior's wounds...

Hope...to the Holy Spirit's heart... *Then they remembered his words...*

What does that feel like to a parent, to a teacher, to a coach...to witness your child, your student, your protégé put the lessons that you taught them into practice??? *Yes!* Says God. *Yes!* Says the risen Christ. *Yes! Yes! Yes!* says the Spirit of life.

Then they remembered his words...

Turning on their heels, the women head back in a vastly different frame of mind. Heavy hearts...are now lighter than light. Tears of sadness... have become tears of Joy. Furrowed brows and frowning mouths are now lit up... with a sense of peace that passes all understanding...

And reaching the house, the women's words... **tumble out** in a mixture of amazement, shock, surprise and delight!...the **stone** rolled away...Jesus' **body gone**...the **angels** and their **brightness**...their strange **question** – and **shocking answer**...and...

...the scowl of disbelief on the apostles' faces... they even scoff at what they consider an idle tale ... refuse to believe the women's story...

Idle tales, says our translation of the bible. What would **you** say are some *idle tales* that you learned as a child, that we read to our kids in books, or see in the movies? Name some of your favorite fairy tales:

Hansel and Gretel, 3 Little Pigs, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast. At **best**, such tales may have a morsel of a moral to teach about life, but beyond that, they are mostly about entertainment, and are most certainly not real...that's what an *idle tale* is...

But the Greek word that's translated in English as "idle tale" is actually has a lot to do with what farmers spread on their fields for fertilizer!

So, put yourself in the women's place for just a moment:



Your head's **swimming**, your heart's **pounding**, your world has just been turned **upside down** and **inside out**; you've **just** had a brush with a *piece of heaven* and **heard** a word that was able to un-do in a **moment** the pain that has **gripped** your **heart** like a *vise of ice* for the last three days...

And then... people whom you trust, whom you know, with whom you have lived and worked as servants of the Lord...these **good people** say... that you're just imagining things, or that you're dreaming, or, **worst** of all, that you are a **lying**???

What does that feel like? To be dismissed? To be taken less than seriously? To be treated with *disrespect* by being *dis-believed*???

These brave women have just shared their life-changing, reality altering, death-defying interaction with two messengers from heaven, no less...and the men accuse them of fabricating at best a bad idea for a Disney movie... and at worst, an outright lie.

As you can see, the **disciples** don't come across looking so good in Luke's Easter account, and the rest of the story proves this by vindicating the women as the first to believe in Jesus' resurrection.

Then when Peter runs to the tomb to see if the women are telling the truth, the story shifts to two other disciples who've gone-off in the opposite direction.



For **some** reason, the men **have** to get to the little town of Emmaus, about 8 miles from Jerusalem. While walking and talking about the sad and painful events of the week, a stranger joins them – (except, **we**, the **readers**, know that this stranger is **no** stranger to the disciples, but the **risen Lord himself** in disguise!)

He plays dumb to the men's conversation until the two confess that their hopes and dreams... had **died** with Jesus' death. *And on top of all that*, the men continue, *some women from their group had gone to his grave and claimed to have "seen" a "vision of angels" who said that Jesus was now alive...*

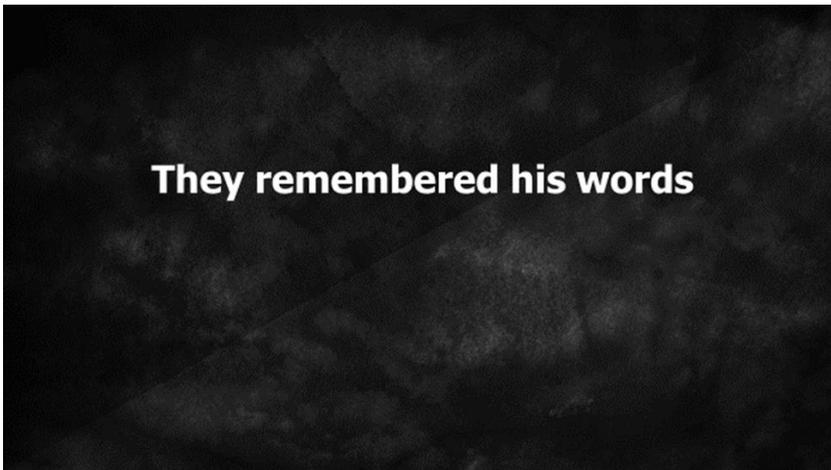
But, they say as they finish their story, *the men who went out to the tomb did not see the Lord.*

Then the Lord says to them, *Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!*

Ouch!

You recall the **women's** response to the angels' message, right?

They remembered (Jesus') words...



They remembered his words

Compare **that** with the disciples' acerbic assertion that the women's story was an *idle tale*:

-the women hear an **angel** and *believe*;

-the men who're talking with Jesus himself refuse to believe!!!

They remembered his words ...

Isn't that a beautiful phrase? **Which** words of the Lord do you think they remembered? Certainly, they had to include the three times that Jesus predicted his betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection. But think of some **other** words of Jesus that they would now start to treasure. Think of **all** his words that **you've** learned to hold in your heart as a treasure.

It's been a fascinating journey to walk through just one Gospel's account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Two years ago we were in Matthew. Last year we studied Mark. And now this year it's been the Gospel of Luke.

And for **some** reason this Holy Week, I was struck by the things in Luke's Passion story that Jesus says from the cross. Now, the words of a dying person have **always** been given *weight in a trial* or **imbued** with a **special power** – and the same is true with **Jesus**.

In fact, I was talking with Carolyn's family about how an anchor of Holy Week used to be that 3 hour long Good Friday afternoon service featuring sermons on each of Jesus' seven last sayings from the Cross. (Did anyone else do that??)

But if you stick to just **Luke's** version of the greatest story ever told, there are only **three** things that Jesus says.

The **first** is when the Lord prays to God as he's being nailed to the cross. Says Jesus, *Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.*

The **second** is his offering of assurance to the thief on the cross who cried out to the Lord, *Remember me when you come into your kingdom.* Says Jesus to the dying man, *Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*

And finally, at the end of his life, Jesus cries with a loud voice, *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!*

So, with his dying breaths, Jesus:

- forgives those who have hurt him terribly
- blesses one who is scared to death
- and commits his spirit into God's tender care.

If these are anything **close** to some of the words that the women remembered Jesus saying, no **wonder** they were able to believe the angels' promise.

And **ultimately**, this is exactly what *you and I* are called to face in matters of our faith, right? We don't get to see the risen Jesus – at least, not in any way that we can recognize. But...like the **women**...we **all** can **remember**...his **words**...

I'm thinking of some **other** words to remember, like:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life...(John 3:16)

Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest...(Matthew 11:28)

With God, all things are possible...(Matthew 19:26)



They remembered his words...

One of our favorite family stories is about a time when we left our children in the care of a neighborhood youth while Carolyn and I went out for dinner and a movie. We gave the kids our usual pep talk: *obey the babysitter, be nice, take care of each other, and we'll check-in on you when we get home.*

Well, later that evening a violent storm came through that set-off the tornado sirens. Apparently Rachel started crying, and worried they'd never see us again. Mark, the older brother (by a year-and-a-half!) said to his sister, ***Don't worry, Rach – they'll come back – they said they would!!!***

How trusting ...how naïve ...how beautiful that they heard our words of promise NOT as an **idle tale**, but as truth to be **trusted**.

Remember Jesus words – for they ARE the **Gospel** truth!!! Jesus is alive, just like he said he'd be. And you and I are blessed today, tomorrow, and forever to follow in the footsteps of those women who remembered his words, and embraced the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

So let's celebrate the Lord's return to life with our voices raised in praise:

Three times I'll say, ***Christ is risen!***
And you respond, ***Christ is risen indeed!***

Amen.