

**Easter: Resurrection Power**  
**Luke 24:1-12**  
**April 4, 2021**  
**Pastor Steve Richards**

For my 10<sup>th</sup> Christmas, I received a magic kit. It was just what I wanted. By today's standards, it rather chintzy – nothing high tech, nothing very amazing – just a black cardboard magic wand with a string in it. When I shook the wand in a certain way, it could break into pieces. When I shook it another way, all the pieces came back together. At least that's the way it was supposed to work. The magic kit had a deck of trick cards that I could never quite get to work properly. It had three magic walnut shells and a little green bead to be hidden under one shell and through the magic of my hands would move under a different shell. And there were a few other props. I read the instruction book, and I practiced the tricks. By the time it was my sister Elizabeth's birthday, I was ready. I don't remember how the decision was made, but I was the entertainment for her birthday party. Our house had a large open front porch that would be my stage. My sister and her friends sat in chairs facing the porch.

I look back on that day and I wonder: what was I thinking? I had never fooled a single person with any of my well-rehearsed tricks, and yet here I was with a full program for probably the toughest possible audience – my sister and her friends. Well, it was awful. No one was impressed by anything. They knew there was no magic. They knew Elizabeth's big brother couldn't do magic. In fact, they knew the end to most of the tricks before I even finished. If there is anyone today who is considering a career in magic, I wouldn't recommend it. At least don't let your first audience be your seven-year-old sister and her friends.

Here we are. It is Easter once again. It is a day with a seemingly magical story that could have been pulled from the vault of the Walt Disney studios. How did God do it? Jesus was dead. That much was certain. On Friday, he was beaten nearly to death and forced to walk outside the city while carrying a cross, and then nailed to that cross. He hung there through most of the day with the hot desert sun beating down on his naked body. After six tortured hours, he was dead, and to be sure he was dead, a soldier pierced his side with a spear. No doubt about it – Jesus was dead. The authorities wanted to be sure of that. His body was carried to a tomb and placed inside, and then the tomb was sealed. To be sure no one would attempt to remove the body, guards stood watch through the Sabbath – through that night and the next day. Early on Sunday morning, women who were followers of Jesus went to the tomb to clean his body and complete the burial ritual. But to their surprise, when they arrived, they found the stone removed that had sealed the entrance to the tomb, and when they went inside, the body of Jesus was gone. Luke tells us – remember Luke spoke with eyewitnesses before writing this account – two men appeared and by their appearance it seemed as if they were sent by God – and the men said **Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised.**

That's the Easter proclamation: He is not dead, but he has been raised. And they didn't know what to make of that. Jesus had told them that he would rise from the dead, but no one really believed that. Why would they? No body ever rises from the dead. Resuscitation, yes. Resurrection, no. There are times when I've spoken to people who say, "I love Jesus, I love what he did, and I want to be more like him – to treat people the way he did. But the part where he died and came back, I don't really believe that." And my response has been: it's good that you admire Jesus and want to follow him. And that you struggle to believe the supernatural things actually puts you in good company, because even his closest followers had a hard time believing this. When Peter and the other disciples heard the testimony of the women, they didn't know what to make of it. **Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't**

**believe the women.** It wasn't a lack of faith; it just wasn't conceivable. Dead people stay dead. There is no plausible explanation for what happened, except that it happened.

And if that's what happened, what difference does it really make? This morning, you woke up. You had breakfast. You sat down to watch this service, and maybe you have a plan for the rest of today, but the day will end, and tomorrow will come. We will go back to work or school or whatever we do every Monday – and the world doesn't seem to change. Same kind of news reports – people hurting people. What difference does Easter really make? Does Easter really change anything? First of all, the resurrection proves everything Jesus said and did. If he had stayed in the tomb, no one would remember a first century Jewish carpenter who was put to death as a common criminal. No one. But because he rose, a small band of men and women would stand up to the darkness. Because he rose, they would put their lives on the line to proclaim hope and to bring hope to a broken world. Because he rose, the Roman empire, the greatest empire the world had ever known, would one day become a footnote in a story where today one third of the world's population would gather in the name of that Jewish carpenter. Because he rose, we know there is more to life than what we experience today. Because he rose, we know death is not the end but just a comma in what God has in store for us. Because he rose, the worst thing is never the last thing. Because of Easter, we dare to believe that the darkness can never defeat resurrection hope.

Fourteen years ago, this church began sending teams to Kenya to assist with a school for girls called Light of Hope. After a few trips, we saw an unmet need in that country. Young women, some as young as 11 or 12 had been forced to have sex and as a result gave birth to a child. This in a country with no safety net, no social services to assist mother or child – prevented from attending school, often rejected by family and community. If there was any future for that teenaged mother, it was bleak. So nine years ago, Carol Erickson who was our children's director at the time felt God calling her to do something – and we commissioned her as a missionary and sent her to Kenya where she established a home called Imara International for young women who are pregnant and have children. This home provides a safe haven where they can receive an education, work skills, and parenting skills. Let me tell you one story – a resurrection story. I've changed the young woman's name and blurred the images to protect her privacy. This is the story of Jane. Two years ago, Carol Erickson received a call that a young woman who was 13 and had a 10-month-old child was living under very difficult circumstances in a remote part of Kenya. It was a 70-mile trip that took 4 hours to reach Jane's home. That Carol would even meet Jane was nothing short of a miracle. Once she arrived permission was necessary from the tribal chief and then from Jane's parents. After permission had been given, Jane was asked if she was ready to leave the only home she had ever known and travel with a stranger, a muzungu (white person) to a place that she could not even imagine. Just 13 years old with a 10-month-old son. She was terrified, but she said, "I want a future for my child." Taking her only possession, a tattered blanket, she and her son took a leap of faith, arriving at the Imara house late that night. It would be the beginning of a future filled with hope.

But a year ago, the pandemic reached Kenya, requiring all children to return to their home villages and that included Jane and her son. But after returning home, there was a tribal uprising and her village was attacked, home burned, people beaten and killed, their cattle stolen. Jane and her son fled into the bush to hide and with no protection they were at risk of wild animals – lions, leopards, and hyenas. Unable to start a fire for fear of being found, Jane had a cell phone and called Carol for help. Too dangerous to travel, Carol found someone to bring blankets and food. Fortunately, Jane and her son survived and 7 months later, restrictions were lifted, and they were able to return to the Imara house. Jane will turn 14 this year. She is studying hard, working on her English, and taking online classes on how to run a salon. She hopes to be

cosmetologist. Her son is a healthy happy two-year-old. Jane's story is but one of more than a dozen similar stories at Imara. She has found a future filled with hope that would never have been possible if not for a church in Plymouth MN that listened to a call to do something even if it took risk and sacrifice. Because of Easter, we dare to believe that the darkness can never defeat resurrection hope.

I've not forgotten a hospital visit that I made early in my ministry. I received a call from Helaine that her husband, John, was near death. I didn't know John well. Helaine was in church every Sunday and assisted with several ministries, but John kept his distance – not interested in church or faith. But John had been diagnosed with Lou Gerry's disease which is one of this world's horrible diseases. His mind continued to function but gradually he lost all muscle function – and at the end, the ability to breath. As I entered John's hospital room, I could tell that he was terrified. He knew he was dying, and he didn't want to die. Nothing could be done to stop the inevitable. I sat next to his bed, and I put my hand on his arm. Unable to move his head, his eyes looked toward me, and he struggled to say these three words – Is it true? Not sure I heard him correctly, I turned to his wife Helaine who said he wanted to hear it from me – is it true – is it true that there is something beyond the life – is it true that God will take care of me – is it true that the worst thing is not the last thing. "Yes, John," I said, "It is true, and I'm counting on it. And with that assurance, he closed his eyes.

We have lived through a difficult year, and even now you may be facing uncertainty about your future. I wish I could wave a magic wand this morning and make all pain and fear and the unpredictability of life disappear. Easter is not God giving you everything you want. Easter is not making the difficult and painful disappear. Easter is knowing Jesus was crucified, dead and buried, but that's not the final word. Even death is not the final word. The final word is Hope. And I don't just believe it. I'm counting on it.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 4, 2021**

**Weekly Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the prophet Isaiah said you would be "the prince of peace." Through your Holy Spirit's great power, enable and empower us to bring about your vision, your plan for this world. Help us, as members of your diverse, worldwide family of believers, to live out the spirit of love, unity and peace that your Spirit brought about in the first group of believers. Amen.

### **Monday, April 5**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:1-12**

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

**Observation:** Even Jesus' death didn't dim the women's loyalty. They returned to Jesus' tomb "very early in the morning on the first day of the week." They went to care for his body as soon as the Sabbath laws (which he had challenged) allowed. They didn't find his body, but did find two men in gleaming clothes who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised." They reported this to the eleven, but true to form for their day, "their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women."

**Application:** "Peter ran to the tomb ... he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened." Surely if Luke invented this, it would say something like, "Peter saw the linen cloth and cried, 'Yes—Jesus is risen!'" (And it would make no sense for grave robbers to take time to unwrap the body, leaving the cloth behind.) Luke showed clearly that not one disciple expected Jesus to rise, though Jesus had told them just that (Luke 9:22). How vital to your faith are the eyewitness reports that Jesus told his disciples in advance what would happen, as well as the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the disciples didn't believe the women, and they couldn't recall your own words enough to believe them, either. Give me a heart that is attentive to your words, and willing to believe them. Amen.

**Tuesday, April 6**

**Scripture: Luke 24:13-24**

On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?" He said to them, "What things?" They said to him, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. But there's more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn't find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him."

**Observation:** Just as Luke shared details about Jesus' birth that no other gospel included, his research found this unique story about the resurrection day. Jesus, unrecognized, walked with two disciples discussing recent events. They were disillusioned ("we had hoped"), sad about the crucifixion, and stunned that some women said Jesus' body was not in the tomb. Note that these two followers gave no sign that they believed the report—just that it puzzled them.

**Application:** In his commentary on this passage, N. T. Wright noted, "It wasn't simply... that they couldn't recognize him. This is a strange feature of the resurrection stories, in Matthew (28:17) and John (20:14; 21:4, 12) as well as here... Jesus' body, emerging from the tomb, had been transformed. It was the same, yet different—a mystery we shall perhaps never unravel until we ourselves share the same risen life." In what ways does Easter make you long to share that risen life, to experience dimensions that for now remain mysterious to us?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, when I am discouraged, disillusioned or disbelieving, please come and join me on the road. It is at those times in particular that I need your living, loving presence with me. Amen.

### **Wednesday, April 7**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:25-32**

Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, “Stay with us. It’s nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?”

**Observation:** On the road to Emmaus, Jesus interpreted for his discouraged followers “the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.” As he broke and blessed bread for them, they recognized him in a flash of insight and memory. His transformed body disappeared, but they joyfully realized that their hearts were on fire as Jesus made the Bible clear.

**Application:** The two disciples on the road urged their unrecognized companion to stay with them. If they hadn’t, they’d have missed the awesome moment when they knew he was Jesus. How urgent are you, individually and as a family, about inviting Jesus into your life? How have you learned to recognize his presence in the midst of everyday life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want you, I need you, to be with me in my home life. Help me, like Cleopas and Mary, to remember to invite you to stay with me at every meal, and every moment. Amen.

### **Thursday, April 8**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:33-49**

They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying to each other, “The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!” Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It’s really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones like you see I have.” As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, “Do you have anything to eat?” They gave him a piece of baked fish. Taking it, he ate it in front of them. Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the

forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I'm sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power."

**Observation:** After meeting the risen Christ at Emmaus, the two disciples rushed back to share the news with the others. As they were speaking, Jesus himself appeared. Luke reported in detail that he was no ghost, but physically alive. Jesus again explained the Scriptures to the disciples and commissioned them to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. "You are witnesses," he said, promising that God's power would help them spread his message.

**Application:** Jesus conquered death, robbing evil of its greatest power. The resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing. That is good news—celebrate and praise God! But Jesus' words in verse 48 apply to you today as much as they did to his first disciples. Jesus called you to share that hope with others. In what ways can you be a witness and share the hope of the resurrection this week? Next week? Throughout the next year?

**Prayer:** Jesus, I am so grateful that you conquered death and offer me the hope of resurrection! Help me to rejoice in that hope, and to be your witness, sharing that hope with others. Amen.

**Friday, April 9**

**Scripture: Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-8**

He led them out as far as Bethany, where he lifted his hands and blessed them. As he blessed them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy. And they were continuously in the temple praising God.

Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God's kingdom. While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "This is what you heard from me: John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" Jesus replied, "It isn't for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**Observation:** From the gospel of Luke, Jesus' story continued directly into volume 2, the book of Acts. Before leaving earth, Jesus charged his followers to witness to him, but not based on their own courage or cleverness. Instead, they were to wait for the Holy Spirit's power. Some have even suggested that instead of "Acts of the Apostles," we might better call Luke's second volume something like "the Acts of Jesus through the apostles."

**Application:** Jesus ordered his disciples "not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised." We Americans tend to be driven and impatient people. How would you react if Jesus told you not to try to do important work for him on your own, without God's power? What spiritual risks can going alone pose for a follower of Christ?

**Prayer:** Jesus, I love the sheer audacity of telling 120 people in a small Roman province that they should reach “to the end of the earth.” I love the Holy Spirit’s power that enabled them to carry out that mission. Give me that vision today, and that power. Amen.

**Saturday, April 10**

**Scripture: Acts 1:9-14**

After Jesus said these things, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going away and as they were staring toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood next to them. They said, “Galileans, why are you standing here, looking toward heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a sabbath day’s journey away. When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, Alphaeus’ son; Simon the zealot; and Judas, James’ son—all were united in their devotion to prayer, along with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

**Observation:** Luke wanted Theophilus (and all other readers) to know Jesus’ story didn’t end in Jerusalem with the cross and the resurrection, or even the ascension. The risen Jesus told his followers that the saving work he had begun would go on through the rest of human history and into eternity. The risen Lord left earth, but two men in white told them this was not the end of Jesus’ story—he would return. His followers devoted themselves to prayer to prepare for the huge task that now lay before them.

**Application:** The *CEB Study Bible* notes that verse 14 is like the opening note of a theme that runs through the story of the early Christians in Acts: “The spirit of unity and the practice of prayer are major features of community life.” Remember, some of his followers were arguing at the Last Supper about which of them would be the greatest, and they would have disagreements in the years ahead that nearly split the church. What was their spirit of unity based on? That same spirit of unity is as crucial for us to carry out the mission Jesus gave us as it was for them. In what ways can you cultivate a spirit of unity, not of division, in your service to God?

**Prayer:** Jesus, Isaiah said you would be “the prince of peace.” Help me, as a member of your diverse, worldwide family of believers, to live out the spirit of unity and peace your Spirit brought about in the first group of believers. Amen.