

Sermon Notes – April 20, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 24: 1-12
Peace Lutheran Church
“An Empty Tomb! Death Could Not!”

All our readings showcase the surprising and amazing way of God's resurrection: life in Christ.

The vision of Isaiah 65 is one of the most vivid in scripture regarding the life God intends. Though likely written to returned exiles (fifth century BCE), it informs Christian imagination about eternal life with God the Father. Not only is this life marked with longevity, secure dwellings, fruitful labor, and world peace; it is also colored by gladness, joy, and delight.

The reading from Acts - Peter's sermon at Cornelius's home - explores the significance of the resurrection. Not only is the risen Jesus judge of the living and the dead, He is also the means of forgiveness and “Lord of all” (10: 36, 42-43). The sermon's content and context make clear that *all* includes Gentiles. The politically charged nature of “Lord” (kyrios) implies Jesus' authority over both earthly and supernatural powers.

The Corinthians reading poignantly clarifies the resurrection's significance for believers: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are all people most to be pitied” (15: 19). Paul uses the biblical practice of “first fruits” - when a harvest's first produce is given to God (Exod. 23: 19) - to portray Christ's resurrection as a harbinger of our life beyond. However we make sense of Paul's projected timeline of events, the end game of death's destruction is a great word of promise.

Luke's account of the resurrection serves to prove its validity: there are two (not one) credible angelic witnesses; they clarify how the resurrection fulfills prophecy; eyewitnesses report it to others; and Peter confirms that their testimony is true. All these aspects are distinctive to Luke, reflecting an agenda of persuading the skeptical. Also unique is the dismissal of the women's testimony in 24: 11 as “an idle tale” (leros, nonsense, foolishness). Although plainly reflecting societal patriarchal bias, Luke's larger chapter clearly deems the women to be credible: their identities are listed last (v. 10), as in written testimonies in antiquity. Peter confirms their testimony (v. 12); and Jesus rebukes those who doubted (vv. 38-39). In short, Luke's inclusion of the dismissal of the women's testimony serves not to question them but to highlight the disciples' foolish disbelief. The women are right - and everyone knows it.

John 20 features Mary Magdalene as the central eyewitness. She experiences a progression from despair to faith: from witnessing death (19: 25-

30), to discovering the empty tomb (20: 1-2), to encountering a divine being (vv. 11-15), to faith in the risen Lord (vv. 16-18). The Greek grammar suggests she is already clinging to Jesus when he bids, "Stop holding on to Me" (v. 17). He likely intended to redirect her focus to the more pressing task: "Go to my brothers and say..." In doing so promptly, Mary becomes the first eyewitness to the risen Lord.