

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Luke 24:1-12  
**SERMON SERIES:** Transforming Journeys  
**SERMON TITLE:** Journey from Death to Life

The Good News of Easter as it comes to us in the Gospel According to Luke, chapter 24:1-12. The story begins with a group of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and who had witnessed his death on the cross, traveling to the tomb to attend to his body. Listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE TEXT**

Over the course of Lent, our focus has been on *Transforming Journeys*. This morning, we're invited on a transforming Easter journey from death to life. And the place to begin is with death—which is exactly where Luke's account begins. The women were on their way to the tomb. Their purpose was to prepare the lifeless body of Jesus with spices and ointments for a proper burial. They were looking for the dead among the dead. This is how the Easter journey begins.

And isn't this how it is with us this morning? Just two days ago on Good Friday, about 90 of us gathered for worship here in the sanctuary to remember the life and death of Jesus. A cross was before us as we told the story of his passion. Candles were lit, including the Christ candle. But then as the story unfolded, the candles were extinguished one by one—including the Christ candle—until we were shrouded in darkness.

After the story of Jesus' death was read, we were invited to remember the hard things in our own lives—those things that can mean the death of us either literally or metaphorically. We were then encouraged to lay down these hard life issues by coming forward, taking a stone from a basket, and then placing the stone at the foot of the cross. As near as I could tell, most everyone came to the cross with a stone. In fact, the last person who came didn't pick up just one stone but a handful of stones and let them all go before the cross.

That was just two days ago on Good Friday. My hunch is that these hard issues that can mean the death of us are still with us this morning—claiming our attention—drawing our focus.

And if this is the case, we've come to right place and we've heard the rest of the story: The women noticed the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, they went in, they did not find the body. They were perplexed. Suddenly, two men in dazzling white stood beside them. They were terrified; they bowed their faces to the ground. The men asked them: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* And then the men proclaimed: *He is not here, but has risen.* The women were told to remember all that Jesus had said about these things—and they did remember—so they went to the eleven remaining apostles and told the story to them. They didn't believe it so Peter went to check it out. He looked into the tomb; he didn't see a body; he did see the linen grave clothes and he was amazed at what had happened.

My brothers and sisters, this is the story that begins to move us from death to life! The hard issues that threaten to be the death of us are real—but as long as Jesus Christ lives—there is hope for us—there is life for us! Jesus is not confined to a tomb; he's been set free to move us all from death to life—not just in the sweet by-and-by but in the concrete here-and-now! And this is God's mighty work!

And I've experienced it. In fact, Easter came a little early for me this year. I told you several weeks ago that beginning on Palm Sunday afternoon, I was going to participate in a 72-hour retreat on the streets of Austin sponsored by Mobile Loaves and Fishes. Emmet Eary and I did it with no money, no cell phone, with just a back-pack and a sleeping roll. There were about 10 of us altogether, including Alan Graham, the Executive Director of Mobile Loaves and Fishes, who has been doing things like this for nearly 15 years.

The purpose of the retreat for me was not to help the homeless, it was to seek the living Christ in myself and in the people I encountered on the street. And I had to begin that journey confronting the reality of death in my own soul. What I discovered about myself was this place of death within me that effectively kept Jesus entombed in my own fear. I had to acknowledge that when it comes to homeless people I kept my distance; I rolled up the windows and locked the doors on the car as if Christ was not alive but dead in me. What compassion I did feel for street people was choked-off by my fear.

But once I got on the streets the transformation from death to life began and I discovered that I didn't have to be afraid. I witnessed Alan Graham engaging homeless people with a tenderness and vulnerability that could only have come from the living Christ within him. I saw him literally embrace a homeless man named Walt even though Walt was for me, an intimidating mess in more ways than one. And before I knew it, I was embracing people like Walt on the street as Christ came alive in me. At the end of the retreat, I asked several homeless men who had joined us for a closing meditation to forgive me for the distance I had kept between myself and the other homeless folks I had encountered through my life. And guess what, they showed me mercy.

The fact is that I saw Christ alive in the people I met on the street. Now granted, many of them had mental health issues and addiction problems and brokenness in their lives of one kind or another, but I saw Christ in them—in the way they showed hospitality to us—in the way they shared their food with one another—in the ways they took care of one another. Christ was not dead and entombed, but alive in them! So you see, Easter came a little early for me this year.

The question is: On this Easter Sunday, how will you experience the transforming journey from death to life?