

It's the last Sunday of the year and a good time to reflect on all that's happened in 2020. But I have to be honest, I'm having a hard time remembering. Did anything big happen this year? Ah yes. Basically everything. You know the list and you're likely getting sick of thinking about it: strife, illness, pandemic, division, anger, isolation, etc, etc, etc. I'm sick of talking about it. I really wish I could push a reset button and start brand new on January 1. But that's not possible, and some of us are wondering how we can face this new year, and some of us are ready to give up and quit.

But this morning, as we close out our *Succession* series, Luke is going to give us some good news. In this year of bad news, would you like some good news? I know I would. But this is no ordinary good news. It's life-changing, eternity-altering, hope, joy, and peace-inducing news that, if true, literally changes everything. As we rest in the afterglow of Christmas, we finish our series with an early celebration of Easter.

**[Luke 23:55-24:1] <sup>55</sup> The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. 24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.**

Jesus has been betrayed, unjustly arrested and crucified, and died. If there was a worst possible outcome, this is it. All appeared lost. As he was buried, some of the women who were with him in the beginning of his ministry followed long enough to see him laid to rest. Luke tells us they returned home to prepare spices and ointments to care for the body of Jesus. Make no mistake. **They are prepping to aid in the decomposition of someone who is dead.** And what was buried with him was their hope in him as the Messiah, the promise of the Kingdom of God, and the dawning of new age of salvation in the New Covenant. A dead Savior is no savior at all. If Jesus is dead, our faith is a sham, and he's is about as effective as putting a dead battery in one of the toys your kids got for Christmas.

Do you end this year feeling like something has died? What in your life are you preparing spices and ointments for? What died and was buried in 2020 that you no longer have hope in? Over the last couple of months God has shown me it's my heart. It's not dead, but it is entombed. I have built walls around it because I don't want to experience the pain of loss and isolation and confusion and doubt, and I've also done it so I can keep going and for my family and for this church. But when you encase your heart in stone in order to avoid pain, you prevent it from experiencing everything else too. I have buried a big part of myself. So, I end the year kind of numb, and I'm too much of a heart guy to keep going in this way. What about you? Ask God to reveal it to you because my guess is he wants to do something about it and renew your hope. If that sounds impossible to you, let's keep reading.

**[Luke 24:2-12] <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the**

third day rise.”<sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words,<sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.<sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles,<sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.<sup>12</sup> But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

The ladies approach the tomb and recognize things aren't as they should be. The stone is rolled away and Jesus' body is missing. Something is amiss, though they don't yet recognize what good news it is. **What evidence is God showing you that maybe not all is lost in your life?**

Suddenly two men, whom we know are angels, appear and make a stunning announcement. It is the second of two angelic announcements to two unlikely groups. The first we celebrated a couple of days ago when an angel told a group of shepherds “I bring you good news of great joy that today that unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And here two angels to a group of women who say “Why are looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen.” God has moved and events occurred exactly as Jesus said they would. **He is not dead. He is alive. And if Jesus is alive, that changes everything.**

Think about the vaccine that started to get rolled out these last couple of weeks. Now, I don't want to debate vaccines. But if it works, it changes everything. A hopeless situation turns hopeful. What was bleak becomes bright. Jesus being alive does the same thing.

The unique hope of our faith is Jesus Christ died, was buried, and three days he rose again. And if he rose again, he is God and everything he said is true. His resurrection is a declaration of victory over the grave. The Kingdom of God invaded this dark world and won. V3 is the first time Luke refers to him as Lord Jesus. He is alive and now reigns victorious as King. And because he lives, those who are his followers are given new life, a new relationship with God, forgiveness of sin through the new covenant, help for today and hope for tomorrow. All of us must decide if we believe it's true because if Jesus is alive, nothing will ever be the same again.

The women tell the apostles and succession has begun. They don't fully know what is happening, but they are the first to witness about the resurrected Christ. It's a theme we've seen over and over again. They receive a message and pass it on to others. They will grow in their understanding of what has just happened, and their witness will grow with it, as we will see in the book of Acts. But it's another reminder to us that all we are responsible for is to pass on what has been given to us and leave the results up to God.

They women are not believed by the apostles. “Idle talk” is a medical term used to describe the ramblings of the very sick. It's quite a compelling argument for the truth of the resurrection. If it's made up, why would the apostles allow for such an unflattering picture of themselves? The truth is they just didn't believe right away. However, one person was moved by the women, and that was Peter. He has learned not to doubt the things Jesus said. He remembered the look Jesus gave him when Peter denied him three times, just like Jesus said he would. But in that moment, Jesus also said that when Peter turns back, he is to strengthen his brothers. So Peter runs to the tomb to check it out and he marvels at what he found. It's not necessarily belief yet, but he was

open to the possibilities, and by the beginning of the book of Acts, there will be no voice louder than his in proclaiming the risen Christ.

So what do we do with this? Like Peter, I want to encourage all of us to **run to the tomb, believe, and receive**. The key to new life in Christ is faith. The book of Romans tells us if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Some of you have never done that before but if you do that this morning, 2020 will instantly go from the worst year of your life to the best. You will be given a new relationship with God and a new life to live with and for him. Your sins have separated you from God but will be forgiven, God will put his Spirit in you to be with you and guide you, and your eternity will be secure. If you make that decision today, let us know. Or, if you want to talk to someone about making that decision, we are here to help.

For the rest of us, we may need to run to the tomb to renew our belief he is risen and receive his grace to sustain us as we go forward. The one who has overcome death can overcome whatever is going on in your life. V6-7 says “Remember how he told you...the Son of Man must be delivered...crucified...” Jesus wasn’t caught off guard when he was arrested, tried, and crucified. It was the unfolding of the perfect plan of God, and he used what was meant for evil for the redemption of mankind. Jesus has also not been caught off-guard by what has transpired in 2020 and he will use it for his purposes, his glory, and your blessing.

Earlier I asked you what you were preparing spices and ointments for in your life? But, in light of this majestic truth, let me ask it in a different way. **What died and was buried in 2020 that you need Jesus to resurrect in the new year?** Now, maybe some of those things need to remain buried because they are no good for you. But what about your hope? Your purpose? Relationships? Energy, enthusiasm, passion? Your love for others and desire to serve them in the name of Jesus? Your health? Who’s packed on their Covid 19?

I need to give my heart to Jesus and ask him to go to work with the power of his resurrection, and I’m going to do that by working with a spiritual director. I need someone to shepherd me because the most important thing in my life is my relationship with Jesus. What is it for you?

As you ponder that question, remember this: Jesus is alive, and he is our hope eternal. Scripture tells us the power that raised Christ from the dead is in us. **That means you are among the living, not the dead.** Some of you need to be reminded of that because you don’t feel alive. Some of you need to put the spices and ointments away and turn to him and receive whatever you need to proceed as one who is among the living.

2021 will not be easy, and we may find ourselves saying some similar things this time next year. But whatever may come, remember the angel’s words. He is not here. He. Is. Risen. **And if Jesus is alive, that changes everything.**