

**AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!**  
**Luke 24:1-12**

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.*

*<sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.*

Luke 24:1-12 *New International Version*

**LET’S PRAY:** Lord, show us what this story means to us, here, now, today. Show us what it means to be people of the empty tomb. Amen.

**It’s early in the morning.** It’s dark. It’s cold. You’re walking down a dark, lonely road to perform a dark, lonely task.

The heavy mist hanging in the air reflects the fog of emotions that you feel right now—loneliness ... despair ... ANGER ... intense sadness ... grief so painful that it makes your whole body hurt.

In your hands you’re carrying a jar full of spices—rich, aromatic spices. This is because in your day they don’t have embalming and nice caskets and vaults in the ground. In your day, bodies are wrapped in cloth, anointed with spices, and placed in a tomb that’s not much more than a cave. But your friend was buried in a hurry and they didn’t do the spices, so you’re on your way to do that now.

It’s the last thing you can do for this person you love so much.

The sun is coming up now. The mist is starting to burn off.

You're at the graveyard now – and there's the tomb--gaping open like the hole in your heart.

And you know that what's inside that tomb is death—the death of friendship ... the death of love ... the death of your hopes for the future.

You stand there staring, looking at the tomb. You don't wanna go in. But you have to. You have to do this for your friend.

As you move closer to the tomb, you thank God that it doesn't stink. That's one less thing to endure.

You stoop your head. You go in.

You look around.

*And the body's gone!*

There's nothing in here except a pile of linen cloths!

The tomb is empty.

THE TOMB IS EMPTY!

And it takes you a while, but eventually you catch on. The tomb is empty because

Christ is risen  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

*-AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

**Think about some of the earth-shattering events that have changed everything:**

A little more than 500 years ago, *everybody was sure* that the world is flat. Think about how that way of thinking affected everyday life. If you believe the world is flat, you're going to go to the beach and look out at the ocean and say, "There's the edge of the world, right out there." You're not going to travel very far because you don't want to fall off the edge!

This way of thinking affected the economy, travel, science, politics ...

**But then**, “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

*-AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

A little more 100 years ago, *everybody was sure* that it was impossible for human beings to fly. Scientists were convinced that heavier-than-air flight would never happen. Lord Kelvin, the famous British physicist, said in 1902 that “...no airplane will ever be practically successful.”

**But then** one year later, two sons of a United Methodist bishop<sup>1</sup> took the train from Ohio to North Carolina. And on a blustery winter day, the Wilbur and Orville Wright successfully flew the first airplane.

*-AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

A little more than 60 years ago, *everybody was sure* that computers would only be used by an elite few. Back then computers were big clunky machines that took up an entire room. Business executives said that the computing needs of the entire world could be met by ... THREE computers. One executive is quoted as saying, “There is no reason that anyone would want a computer in their home.”

**But then**, Steve Jobs created Apple, and Bill Gates created Microsoft,

*-AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

Computers have changed the way we work, the way we play, the way we shop, the way we watch TV and movies, the way we communicate ...

- Raise your hand if you have a smart phone
- Raise your hand if you have an email account

Computers have changed the world!

*-AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

**A little more than 2000 years ago, everybody was sure that Jesus of Nazareth was dead.** His movement was over, his followers were finished, and

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Milton Wright was a bishop in one of the denominations that merged to become the United Methodist Church. His name is listed in our *Book of Discipline*.

his body was rotting in a grave. When they saw him nailed to a cross, and they watched him die, *everybody was sure* that it was over.

***But then*** a group of women discovered an empty tomb—

- *AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT*

Now we know...

- That death is not death!
- That the end is not the end!

And to paraphrase the great theologian Yogi Berra, “It ain’t over ... *because it ain’t over!*”

Here’s what the empty tomb means:

***It means there’s hope!***

***It means that God has the last word!***

Yes, we have to suffer in the meantime. All kinds of pain. All kinds of hardships and difficulties. Sadness, grief ... times when we feel like we can’t go on.

But the empty tomb shows us that our present sufferings are not all there is! God has the last word.

My dad used to say, “Son, when your mother and I argue, I always have the last word. And the last word is, ‘Yes, Dear.’” Well, when God and the forces of evil argue, God always has the last word. And the last word is RESURRECTION.

**The empty tomb is proof that *God is going to win!*** We are in the last days of March Madness—the NCAA men’s basketball tournament. And as of last night, all four of the teams I pulled for have lost—Virginia, Carolina, Duke (yes, I pulled for Duke!), and now Loyola. All my teams have lost.

But here’s the Good News: The empty tomb is proof that at the end of time, when the final, final, final buzzer sounds, God is going to win.

And how do I know? I know because

Christ is risen!  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

**Now, go back for a minute to those events that changed everything.** Our whole world is different because Columbus discovered America.<sup>2</sup> Our whole world is different because the Wright Brothers discovered the power of flight. Our whole world is different because IBM discovered the Personal Computer.

*But is **your world** any different because those women discovered the empty tomb?*

There are still people who believe the earth is flat. And there are still people who have never flown in an airplane. And there are still people who've never used a computer. All these powerful changes don't do a thing for you **unless you accept them into your life.**

And whether you've ridden on an airplane or used a computer, I don't care. But I care deeply about whether you experience the power of the resurrection in your everyday life.

The power of the resurrection is the power of hope!

It's the power of new life!

It's the power to change things!

Are you stuck in a dead marriage?

- The God who raised Jesus can resurrect your marriage.

Are you stuck in a dead end job?

- The God who raised Jesus can resurrect your career.

Are you struggling financially?

- The God who raised Jesus can provide for you in ways you didn't expect.

Are you in a death spiral of substance abuse?

- The God who set Jesus free from death can set you free from addiction.

Are you so discouraged you just want to give up?

- The God who surprised those women at the tomb can surprise you with reasons to keep going.

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware that historians now believe that Vikings were the first Europeans to set foot on American soil. I'm also aware that the notion of "discovering" America is problematic. As author Russell Freedman says, "[Columbus] wasn't the first, and neither were the Vikings. That is a very Euro-centric view. There were millions of people here already, and so their ancestors must have been the first." Nonetheless, it is accurate to say that it was the journeys of Columbus that led to European expansion into the New World, which (for good or ill) led to the world we live in today.

Are you so lonely you feel like you could die?

- The empty tomb says you're never alone because the risen Christ is with us.

Are you afraid? Afraid of the future? Afraid of death? Afraid of what's going to happen in these crazy times we live in?

- You know what? I don't blame you!
- But the empty tomb says that the worst thing that can happen just might be the best thing there ever was!

As Frederick Beuchner (a real theologian) said,

*"Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing."*

And if you really believe that, it will make a difference in your everyday life!

**Today is April Fools' Day.** One of the best April fool's jokes of all time was on April 1, 1957 when the BBC did a news story about the "spaghetti harvest" in Switzerland. They showed Swiss farmers picking strands of spaghetti off of trees. The next day hundreds of people called the BBC to say, "Where can I get a spaghetti tree?"

And the BBC operators said, "Put a strand of spaghetti in a jar of tomato sauce and hope for the best."

You know how April Fools' Day got started?

Nobody's really sure, but some people think it goes back to the 1500s, when we adopted a new calendar. Under the old calendar, the New Year started in April. Under the new calendar (the one we still have), the New Year starts in January. And the story goes that some people either didn't know or didn't care that the calendar had changed, so they kept celebrating the New Year in April.

And these people were called "April Fools."

Why? Because everything had changed, *but they didn't*—and for that reason, they were considered foolish.

**Are you foolish?**

- Are you among those who don't know or don't care that the empty tomb changes everything?

- Are you among those who only come to church on Easter, but as soon as the service is over, you're going to walk out of here and it's going to make no difference to your everyday life?
- Are you among those who come to church every single Sunday, and still it makes no difference to your everyday life?

The resurrection changes everything, but if it hasn't changed YOU, that's a problem.

**Don't be an April fool!** Commit your life to Jesus Christ. Tap into the power of resurrection. Let God breathe new life into your marriage, your career, your finances, your emotions--whatever part of your life needs resurrection.

Hand your life over to God and say, "God, here I am. I'm not perfect, but I'm yours. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. I want to *be* different, and I want to *make* a difference—through the power of resurrection."

The tomb is empty—*AND NOW, EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT!*

I pray that everything is different for you.

#### **LET'S BOW OUR HEADS:**

If you would like to commit, or re-commit, or re-re-re-commit your life to Christ, then pray silently in your own words something like this: "God, I'm yours. Forgive me in Jesus' name. Fill me with your Spirit, and help me follow Jesus for the rest of my life."

*[Silence]*

And now let's do this: Think of an area in your life where there needs to be resurrection. Picture that situation in your mind. So if it's your marriage, you might picture your spouse. If it's your job, you might picture your workplace. If it's your finances, you might picture a pile of bills.

*[Silence]*

Lord, you see what's on our hearts. I pray that you would pour out your Holy Spirit on my brothers and sisters and breathe new life into these areas where they are struggling. In Jesus' Name. Amen.