



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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An Easter Sermon by Brent J. Eelman

“Looking for Life in all the Wrong Places”

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men* said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

One Easter a preacher and a New York City taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them.

'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver.

The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the preacher to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.

'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the preacher. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a preacher, went to church every day, and preached God's word.'

'Yes, that's true.' St Peter rejoined, 'But during your Easter sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

The Easter sermon is the annual crisis for the preacher. What can we add to the message of Easter? It takes audacity to add to the message, “He is risen!” and yet we plod on.

I think about the congregation I face on Easter. It is not the same old congregation.

- There are some here out of habit, they are here every Sunday. They are the faithful followers, here, because they always are.
- Some are here with many questions.
- Some almost believe.
- Some are sceptics, perhaps merely curious.
- Some are here because they are hoping to find a faith that they once had... to rediscover the joy of believing.

- Some are here for the music, and the uplift that it brings....
- and some are here, spiritually hungry, hurting perhaps... wanting to believe, willing to give religion one more chance, hoping that it is all true.
- And of course there are some, who are here because a parent or spouse laid down the law and said, “you will be here.”

But there is one thing that we all have in common: our common humanity and our search for the meaning of it all. We, like the women on that first Easter morning: we are looking for life. We are looking for something, someone who will give meaning and hope to the tangled realities with which we live.

Three points: 1. **Looking:** or the eternal quest of humanity. 2. **Life:** the object of our searching. 3 **Living:** How do we respond to the news of the Risen Christ?

I

Looking: I had a “looking dream” that continues to haunt me. I am in one of the large warehouse stores. Aisles and aisles of merchandise are piled to the ceiling. There is a list in my hand of items I am supposed to find and purchase. I walk up and down the aisles looking for the items on the list, but to no avail. I stop fellow shoppers and they just shrug when I ask them where I might find the things. I am feeling more and more desperate. Time feels like it is slipping away from me. I finally encounter a young sales person and ask her if she can help me. She looks at the items on the list and shakes her head. “You won’t find those things here. You are looking in the wrong store, mister... You are in the wrong place!”

Looking in the wrong place. We spend a great deal of time, effort, and resources, looking in the wrong places. The women on that first Easter morning were confronted with this reality when the 2 men told them, “You won’t find the living Christ in a cemetery!”

If we are looking for life,

- filled with purpose,
- life that is resilient,
- life filled with joy,
- life that makes sense,
- life that is hopeful....

Sadly, we won’t find it in a cemetery.

- Nor the mall
- Nor the stadium
- Nor a getaway vacation
- Nor the mountains or the shore
- It is not in the latest fashions, nor the new car, nor the nice boat, nor the next toy, nor the next hobby... no

We won’t find it in most of the places we look. Sadly, we look for life, abundant and eternal in all the wrong places. It is the human tragedy.

II

Life: What is this life that we seek? What is this thing called eternal life? Do you know? Do we know? We are looking for it, but not sure that we know exactly what we are looking for. In the now classic movie, “City Slickers” a trio of middle age men, (in mid-life crisis) are on a cattle drive. They are there because they are looking for something... just not sure what it is. The classic line comes from Curly, the cowboy leading them. “One thing, just one thing is important.” When asked what that one thing is, he replies, “You will know when you find it.” We are not always sure what this life is that we are looking for, but we live with the hope that we will know when we find it.

The women going to the grave that morning were looking for one thing, just one thing. They were looking for the one whom they believed was the Messiah, the Savior. They were looking for the life that they experienced in him. They were not sure what they would encounter, (who of us knows what we will encounter in the next hour?). They arrived at the grave, but it was empty: “You are looking in the wrong places.... Only death here.” Then the key word uttered by the men in the grave: **“remember”** “Remember what he told you...”

Remember: Where did they encounter the living Christ? It was in his service to others. They remembered Jesus’ teachings that life is found in loving and serving one another.

- Life is found in feeding the hungry.
- Life is found in healing the sick.
- Life is found in discipleship that empties itself so that others may be filled.
- Life is found in the pursuit of justice for widows, orphans and all those whom society casts out.
- Life is found in community, where we blend our differences, whether they are the different voices of the choir, the different sounds of the orchestra, the different races of humanity, the different expressions of love, caring, family, and hope.
- Life is found where two or three are gathered in his name.

The women remembered what he said... and they recalled their encounter with eternity.

III

Living: Where will we find the living messiah? Where will we discover the living Christ?

Henri Nouwen tells the Talmudic story of a rabbi’s search for the living messiah. He asked Elijah, “When will the Messiah come?”

Elijah answered him, “Go and ask the Messiah himself!”

The rabbi asked, “And where is he sitting?”

Elijah answered, “At the gate of the city. He is sitting among beggars afflicted with disease. All of them untie and tie their bandages at the same time. But he unties and ties his bandages one by one. For he says, ‘I might be needed at any moment. Therefore, I deal with my bandages in this way so that I will not be delayed.’” (from *The Wounded Healer*).

The living Christ is with the poor and needy. The living Christ is ready to help, in spite of his own wounds.

Living: I am convinced that if we are looking for life, eternal life, life in all its fullness; if we are looking for the risen Christ, the Messiah... we should look and live among the needy, the wounded, those who live outside the gates our lives.

The message of Easter is that Christ is alive. He lives! And if we want to look for him... we with the women of that first Easter, need to remember where he has always been; where he is now: serving those in need... the least of these. And if we want to experience the eternal, (life in all its fullness) we need to join him in service. Christ is alive and risen to serve. Alleluia! Amen.