

In Remembrance of Me - Luke 23:55-24:8

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This weekend for many Christians is the most important one of the year. Millions of Christians around the world will be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ tomorrow, known as Easter Sunday. Few holidays have been the source of more discussion and debate than Easter. Incidentally, in the days of the apostles there were no annual Christian festivals or celebrations. It was probably sometime in the 2nd century AD when Christians began an annual celebration of our Lord's resurrection. Originally Easter was celebrated as a Christian substitute for the Passover. In fact, in some languages the word for "Easter" is the same word for "Passover". And for a while the two celebrations took place on the same day. Since both Easter and the Communion Service have their origins in the Passover, today is certainly a fitting Sabbath to take part in the Communion Service.

For the next few minutes we will consider the first story in Luke's account of the resurrection. It is found in Luke 23:55-24:8. We will begin by reading Luke 23:55-56. (READ) Luke here highlights the experience of several women. Luke says they had been with Jesus while He was ministering in Galilee. It is possible they had taken the responsibility of providing food for Jesus and His disciples, while they were in Galilee. And now after Jesus' death, they are once again taking care of Him. They take notice of the tomb where Jesus is laid. And afterwards they go home and prepare spices in order to embalm (or preserve) Jesus' body after the Sabbath. According to John 19:39, 40 Joseph and Nicodemus had already done so. In fact, John says Nicodemus provided about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus' burial. But I believe out of love and devotion to Jesus these women desire to provide Jesus' body with spices of their own. Luke says that the women prepared these spices on Friday afternoon before sunset. They rest on the Sabbath according to the 4th Commandment in Exodus 20. Interestingly, according to Mark the women buy more spices Saturday night (Mark 16:1). It's as if they did not have enough time Friday afternoon to finish what they had started.

Let's continue now with Luke's account by reading Luke 24:1-2. (READ) The women here experience several consecutive surprises. Early Sunday morning they are on their way to the tomb. Their plan is to embalm Jesus' body with the spices they have purchased and prepared. According to Mark the women realize on the way that they haven't thought about how they were going to remove the stone. Well, then comes their first surprise that morning. The stone is rolled away. Can you imagine their thoughts? "What providence!" "Problem solved!" "How did this happen?!" It was only the first of several surprises for them that morning. Let's read Luke 24:3. The women go in the tomb with their spices and experience their second surprise of the morning. Jesus' body is no longer in the tomb. Some tombs were made for multiple "inhabitants". So perhaps they looked around for a while. But as Luke recorded earlier, they had been there when Joseph and Nicodemus put Jesus in the tomb. So, they probably would have known where to look for Him. Luke says in the following verse (verse 4) that when they discover that Jesus' body is gone, they were "greatly perplexed". The only comfort they had clung to was gone. Having been deprived of Jesus' living presence, they had at least looked forward to caring for His body. But even this has now been taken away. This surprise caused them great distress. Then a third surprise met them. Let's read Luke 24:4-5. (READ) Suddenly two men in shining clothes stood next to them. Luke describes their response: "they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth." Their emotions suddenly turned from distress to fear. What a morning this was turning out to be for these women! We're not sure how long it took them, but according to Luke 24 and verse 23 at some point the women realized that these men were actually angels who had taken human form. Finally, the angels' message must have been a complete and

final surprise. Let's read together Luke 24:6-7. (READ) They gently rebuked the women: "Why are you looking for the living, risen Lord in a tomb? Don't you remember what He said?" The angels then quoted Jesus' own words. (So, apparently when Jesus was teaching in Galilee, these angels were listening!) What a message this must have been for these women's ears! They had come looking for Jesus' dead body. And instead they are told by two shining angels in human form that Jesus is alive! "He is risen!" Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (pg. 1023) that if it weren't for the reality of these three words, there would be no reason to be a Christian. Our death would be an eternal dead end. But because Christ is risen, Paul exclaims in verse 57, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." He has conquered death. The grave is not the end. Praise the Lord! Let's read our last verse from Luke: chapter 24 and verse 8. Luke says, "they (the women) remembered". It's amazing that the only people who remembered these words after Jesus' death were the chief priests and the Pharisees. Matthew records that they went to Pilate on the Sabbath. In chapter 27 and verses 63 they say, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.'" How sad that Jesus' followers didn't remember these words until the angels reminded them on Sunday morning. But what joy this reminder must have brought to these women! How happy they were when they remembered!

There is a legend that at the time of the crucifixion the dogwood had been the size of the oak and other great trees. So firm and strong was the tree that it was chosen as the timber for the cross. To be used thus for such a cruel purpose greatly distressed the tree, and Jesus nailed upon it, sensed this. And in His gentle pity for all sorrow and suffering said to it: "Because of your regret and pity for My suffering, never again shall the dogwood tree grow large enough to be used as a cross. Henceforth it shall be slender and bent and twisted. And its blossoms shall be in the form of a cross....two long and two short petals. And in the center of the outer edge of each petal there will be nail prints, brown with rust and stained with red. And in the center of the flower will be a crown of thorns. And all who see it will remember...."

The flowers on the dogwood tree help us remember our Lord's sacrifice for us. Easter weekend helps us remember that we serve a risen Lord. And Communion also helps us remember. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 11:23-24. These are the words of Paul, who seems to have been given a vision of the Last Supper, for he quotes Jesus' words that night. (Read) The reason we take part in the Communion service is so that we will remember. Let us not forget what our Lord has done. He washed the feet of His servants. His body was abused, crucified and finally put in the grave. His blood ran down the cross as He gave up His life. Every time we take part in this service, this is what we are remembering. And together with Easter weekend we also remember His resurrection. He has conquered death!

It is now time for foot-washing service. The men will be serving each other in the school wing of the building. And the women will be serving each other in the fellowship hall. Anyone who does not wish to be a part of this service is asked to remain in the sanctuary for the Communion service which will follow the foot-washing service.