

the tomb is empty

Luke 24:1 - 11

thought for the week

The accounts of the women finding the tomb empty are described in all 4 gospels (*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*). The importance of these accounts cannot be underestimated, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is foundational to the Christian faith. In his account, Luke emphasizes the reality of the physical resurrection of Jesus, Christ is real, but his body is no longer subject to the same physical laws, as he appears and disappears at will and goes through locked doors.

The resurrection witnesses are women. In Jewish law a woman's testimony was not seen as valid as that of a man, a woman's evidence was assumed to be unreliable and untrustworthy. So given the role of women, the Easter story is unlikely to be false.

The emotions of the disciples at every stage are consistent – disbelief, fear, terror and bewilderment. This is hardly surprising, they witnessed Christ's arrest and crucifixion, they knew his body had been placed in a sealed tomb, no wonder they could not believe that he had risen from the dead, even when he appeared among them.

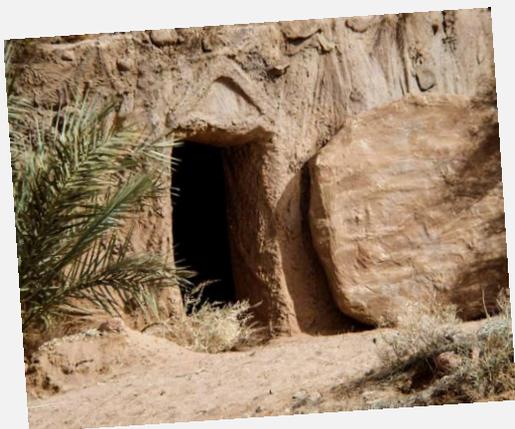
Take time to enter into the story and imagine the scene.

verse for the week

*Why do you look for the living
among the dead?*

Luke 24 verse 5

image for the week



prayer for the week

*Risen Jesus,
your first disciples were
incredulous at the mystery of your
rising from the dead.
We too can doubt, disbelieve, be
confused.
Give us a sense of your risen
presence with us at all times.
Amen.*

reflection for each day



day one:

At early dawn they came to the tomb

Because of Sabbath, the women had to wait until the Sunday morning to complete the burial rites, hence they were carrying spices. They were grief stricken, all their hopes for Jesus had been cruelly dashed by his crucifixion, their last act of love for Jesus was to anoint his body. Think about the last act you would do/have done for someone you love.



day two

The stone was rolled away

To their amazement, the women saw that the heavy stone which had sealed the tomb had been rolled aside. Can you imagine going to a grave and finding it empty?



day three

Two men in dazzling clothes

Not only is the tomb empty, but two men in dazzling clothes were stood there and they spoke to the terrified women. They bow their faces to the ground, women were not expected to look into the eyes of strange men. The men are assumed to be angels.



day four

He is not here, he has risen

The men remind the women of the words of Jesus, he had told his followers time and time again that he would die and rise again. He was alive and no longer entombed by death.



day five

Remember how he told you ... on the third day he will rise again

Finally the 'penny drops', and they remember and believe what Jesus had said. When has the 'penny dropped' in your life?



day six

They told all this to the eleven and all the rest

The women were so convinced that Jesus had risen, that they ran back to the male disciples to tell them what had happened at the tomb. They wanted to share the good news.



day seven

An idle tale

The women were those who had been with Jesus during his ministry, they were there at the cross whilst all the male disciples bar one (John) had run away. They have seen the empty tomb and yet they were not believed. How awful...

for the group

as you gather...

- Ponder these verses, read them aloud slowly together. What different emotions can you identify in the passage? What strikes you most?
- Being sensitive to anyone in the group who has been recently bereaved, what emotions are normally associated with grief?
- “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (v6). What does this phrase mean to you? Where might we look for Jesus in the wrong places today and so miss him?
- How might we keep Jesus ‘entombed’ in tradition, in our buildings, in our Christian circles, in our ways of thinking?

prayer for the group

*Risen Christ,
you accompany us in all the circumstances
and emotions of our lives.
May your healing presence touch those
whose lives are torn by grief and sadness.
We pray that you will help free us from the
tombs of our own making and the disbelief
which weakens our trust in you.
Amen.*



continue the conversation
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the road to emmaus

Luke 24.13 - 35

thought for the week

This one of the most well known of the resurrection appearances of Jesus: it is the evening of that first day, and the two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem, self absorbed and wrapped up in their own thoughts and confusion. Their hearts are heavy with grief and the bad news that Jesus has suffered a premature and violent end, and they are unable to see beyond the event of his death.

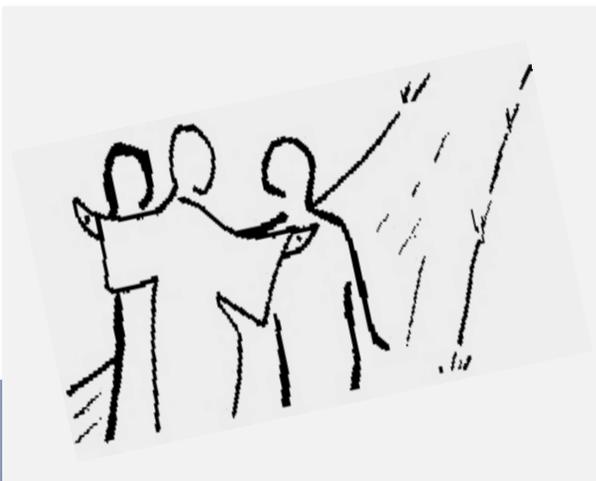
Bad news is not always what it seems, how we look at it and what we see depends on our knowledge, openness and understanding. The disciples' vision is dulled, they do not recognize Jesus as he comes alongside them. They see him as a stranger, but one who patiently listens to their anguish and confusion. As they travel and talk and eat with Jesus they go on a spiritual journey themselves. They move from despair to hope, confusion to understanding and their eyes are opened as they finally recognize Jesus as he breaks bread with them at supper.

verse for the week

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him

Luke 24 verse 31

image for the week



prayer for the week

Risen Lord,
you walk with us along the road
of life.

Open our eyes to see you in all
the circumstances of our lives.
Open our minds to discover you
speaking to us through the
Scriptures.

Amen.

reflection for each day



day one:

Jesus himself draws near and goes with them

One of features of the resurrection appearances is that Jesus appears at will and he is not immediately recognizable to those meeting him. How often we do not recognize the God who walks alongside us each day.



day two

What are you discussing?

It's good to talk! The stranger invites the two disciples to tell him what they are pondering. We are free to talk to God, to Jesus, about what is happening in our lives at any time. Share anything you are perplexed and concerned about with God today.



day three

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel

The disciples hopes had been dashed, there is huge disappointment, we can imagine them wondering 'What do we do next?' We all have such emotions: reflect on your dashed hopes and disappointments today.



day four

How slow of heart you are to believe

Once again the disciples have missed the deeper meaning of the Scriptures. It is easy to miss what Jesus is really saying to us and to misinterpret Scripture and not understand what is being said to us.



day five

Stay with us

Jesus never imposes, but awaits our invitation for him to join us. Christ joins the disciples for supper, during which he takes bread and blesses it, and shares it. Invite Christ to stay with you today.



day six

Their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished

It is as he takes bread at supper that the 'penny drops' and they recognize him. They then remember how their hearts had burned within them as he explained the Scriptures to them on the road. At the point of recognition, he vanished from their sight.



day seven

They return to Jerusalem

They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had seen and how they had recognised Jesus when he took bread and broke it. When the church takes bread and wine as Jesus commanded, is still recognised as a place where we meet Christ today.

for the group

as you gather...

- Can you think of and describe an experience when you did not initially recognize someone you know well?
- How often do you walk with Jesus and tell him honestly all that is going on for you?
- Recall the times when you have moved in your faith from despair to hope, confusion to understanding? When have your eyes been opened to God's truth?
- Where do you encounter God/Christ?

prayer for the group

Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked,
no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts
that we may seek the good of others
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace
to the praise of God the Father.
Amen.

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Apprentice

the risen christ

Luke 24:35-49

thought for the week

It is still Easter Day and the drama continues. The group of disciples are together in Jerusalem listening to the account of the two who have just returned hot foot from Emmaus. The risen Christ comes and stands among them. They are incredulous and disbelieving, which is a feature of all the resurrection appearances. Jesus is at pains to prove to them that his body is real, he is no hallucination or ghost, he has scarred hands and feet, and he can eat. Yet still, they find it hard to recognize him.

His opening greeting “Peace be with you” echoes the message of the angels at his birth. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem because it failed to understand what made for peace (*Luke 19 v41*); peace is the message of God, this is more than the absence of conflict.

Christ’s final instructions make it clear once again that Jesus’ resurrection is the fulfillment of the scriptures. The two men at the tomb, the stranger on the road to Emmaus and Jesus himself remind them that his death and resurrection were part of God’s plan from the beginning of creation.

verse for the week

Jesus said “Peace be with you”

Luke 24 verse 36

image for the week



prayer for the week

Risen Christ,
 you give us your peace,
 help us to shed that peace
 wherever we are,
 so that your peace may permeate
 our world.
 Amen.

reflection for each day



day one:

They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost

They had seen Jesus die, they had laid him in the tomb, different people had reported that the tomb was empty and that he was alive, and now here he is! No wonder they were startled and terrified, it was too good to be true.



day two

Look at my hands and my feet

Jesus shows them his scarred hands and feet, on them he bears the marks of the cross, he really did die. He invites them to touch him for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, he really has risen. We have a God who in Jesus embraces suffering and pain.



day five

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed

Luke throughout his gospel has stressed the importance of repentance and forgiveness and God's welcome for the sinner. A change of heart is needed when we approach Christ.



Have you anything to eat?

They are delighted to see him but they are still wondering. To further prove that he has a real physical body, Christ asks for something to eat.



You are witnesses

Having been with Jesus there is a responsibility to witness to the good news of God. Everyone is welcome in God's sight, it is a message of hope for all nations and for every individual. How often is the church seen as a place of exclusion rather than of inclusion?



day four

He opened their minds to understand the scriptures

When reading Scripture we need to have our minds opened to understand what is being said, so many problems arise when we want scripture to fulfill our plans and understandings.



day seven

Stay here in the city

Despite all the excitement, the disciples are told to wait rather than rush ahead. They did not know quite what they were waiting for even though Jesus had spoken of sending the Holy Spirit to them.

for the group

as you gather...

- What are the characteristics of a witness to Christ? Think as widely as you can e.g. some people witness through action, others through suffering and persecution...
- How is repentance and forgiveness exercised in your Christian life and group?
- Waiting is not always easy, we often like to act, how do you wait upon God?
- 'Clothed with power from on high' means different things to different people, what does it mean to you?

prayer for the group

Lord Jesus,
you invite us to witness to your good news
of love and forgiveness in our lives.
May our words and actions be the fruits of
our waiting upon you,
and may we be given the strength and
insight to know what, where and how to
act in your name.
Amen.



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the ascension

Luke 24:50-53 & Acts 1:1-11

thought for the week

Luke is the only writer to mention the Ascension, both in his gospel and in his sequel – the book of Acts. There are some differences in the accounts, with greater detail in Acts. However it happened, the Ascension is crucial. There needed to be an end to the earthly ministry of Jesus. Through the Ascension, Christ is released from the constraints of physical time and space. As a result he becomes available for all people in every age and place. The Ascension is both an end and a beginning.

In Acts, Luke tells us that the Ascension takes place after 40 days. 40 days is a significant phrase in scripture, and means a fairly long period of time. It is used to describe times of preparation, so the disciples are being prepared for the next stage of their mission during the 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and his Ascension. The cloud in Scripture is a symbol of God's presence. The Hebrew understanding of the universe at that time was that there were 3 layers of space: heaven above; earth; and the water under the earth (underworld) so the notion of ascending was vital to their world view.

verse for the week

While he was blessing them he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven

Luke 24 v51

prayer for the week

Eternal God,
give us the strength
and courage
to continue your mission in the
world today, following the
example of Christ.

Amen.

image for the week



reflection for each day



day one

Lifting up his hands he blessed them

Jesus' final act was to bless his followers. We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. Think about how you might bless someone today.



day two

And they worshipped him with great joy

He is leaving them and yet they are worshipping him as daily they continue to praise God in the Temple. It seems at last that they know and understand what has happened.



day three

An orderly account Acts

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke reminds Theophilus that in his first book he has written about Jesus' life and teaching. He stresses that Jesus rose from the dead and gives more detail of Jesus final words to his followers following his resurrection appearances.



day four

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

In the Jewish faith, people were baptized with water as a sign of purification and conversion – an act that could be repeated. Jesus himself was baptized by John, in the river Jordan. Here Jesus foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, they will be baptized with the Spirit.



day five

You will receive power

The power which will be given is not the power of a worldly kingdom, or the power of status or financial security or physical strength: it will be a greater power, a power based on love, truth, justice and peace.



day six

Witnesses to the ends of the earth

They are to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. From these tiny beginnings Christianity became a worldwide faith spreading to every continent and clime, and it has billions of adherents today. Your witness is vital today.



day seven

Why are do you stand looking up to heaven

There is work to do; the disciples are not to stand around enjoying the moment. Worship, namely encounter with God should send us back out into the world, ready to do God's will.

for the group

as you gather...

- Last words and instructions can be very significant, what have been the most influential last words given to you and by whom?
- The Christian church is worldwide, what do you know about Christians in other parts of the world? How can you find out?
- How might their understanding and faith encourage you?
- Does your worship inspire folk to go out or is it seen as an escape from the world?

prayer for the group

Risen Christ,
you bless us,
so that we may be a blessing
to all those we meet,
may we never abuse this trust.
Help us to live
gracious and grateful lives
and to work for the building up
of your Kingdom
in hearts and lives.
Amen.



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Apprentice