

**Easter 2016**  
**Luke 24:1-11**

The word *empty* has a bad reputation. It doesn't get any respect. Nobody likes empty. Empty on your gas gauge is probably printed in red. It comes with its own flashing light that is set to go off just after the prices go up. Mine even beeps at you and gives a warning note on the dashboard ... miniature marquee ... low on fuel. If empty describes your refrigerator, you won't need a flashing light, your teenagers will be sure to let you know. There are new refrigerators now that scan their own contents and will give you a printout of all the things you don't have. Empty is bad when it's the Coco Puffs box. Empty is worse when it's the cookie jar. Empty is really bad when it's your wallet.

Don't you just hate empty? How about empty coffee mugs? I usually bring a cup of coffee with me in the morning. If I go home for lunch, I bring another cup in the afternoon. For all the incentive to bring a full cup along, there is very little incentive to take them home, so they accumulate. I can often tell what day of the week it is by counting the empty cups on my desk and dividing by two. Nobody likes empty.

So here's my question ... what are we going to do with this empty tomb we have this morning? What are we going to do with one slightly used empty hole in the ground? For sale ... cheap ... Kijiji or Craig's List - 20% off!

Why don't we put some stuff in it? You know, like a storage locker. Do you have anything you want to get rid of? Tears, grief, sorrow, pain, worry, anger, sin, covetousness, greed, hatred ... throw them in that big empty hole. Perhaps we could take up a collection from our favourite Easter hymns. All the things that we can now throw away: because He lives, all fear is gone. Throw it in the hole. Death of death and hell's destruction. The reign of death was ended ... into the hole. Hell's fierce powers beneath you lie. Death, hell and Satan, He vanquished His foes ... into the hole. Where is your sting, death, we fear you no more.

That's a good one to stop at ... how much we fear death. So often we don't want to say the word. He passed away, she's gone. I still remember when my father died, the nurse wrote on his chart that he *dreamed up*. Our natural inclination is to cover up death but now we don't have to. We can throw it into the hole with the rest.

The hymnbook says:

- for all our transgressions, His blood does atone
- death no longer can appall me
- death's reign is done
- doubtings, hence ... all I need God will dispense
- this joyful Eastertide, away with sin and sorrow
- death's flood has lost its chill
- He crushed sin, Satan, death and hell
- His cross has banished all your sin
- He lives to silence all my fears
- He lives to wipe away my tears
- He lives to calm my troubled heart
- He lives my hungry soul to feed
- He lives to help in time of need

You see, beloved, because of Easter all these things are history. Because the grave is empty we can throw away all that stuff ... into the hole ... into the abyss.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

Aren't those wonderful words? All those things that hinder, all those things that entangle, all those things that tie us down or stress us out, if you've ever wondered what to do with them, now you know. We have this big empty hole that we can dump them all in. That is what the promise of the resurrection means.

Scripture tells us: Revelation 21:3-4: *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Old Testament ... Isaiah 65:19 *"I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more."*

Psalms 103:12: *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

Did you ever wonder where they went? Now you know. Jesus carried them all to the cross and then He left them behind in the tomb when He rose from the dead. So, maybe that tomb isn't so empty after all. You see, empty isn't so bad after all. Empty is good when the grave is empty and Jesus is risen, just as He said. That first Easter morning Jesus' followers had hearts that were filled with fear, filled with worry, filled with grief, filled with sorrow and confusion. The women that morning went to the tomb intending to anoint a dead body. They had a sad mission ahead of them, but it was the last thing they could do for one they loved. On the way they worried about who would move the stone. When they saw the stone rolled away but did not find the body, their hearts were filled with wonder. When the angels appeared, Matthew says that they were filled with fear. But then something happened. Joy happened. The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

We can learn something from that. If we want to empty our hearts of fear and worry, if we want to empty them of sorrow and sin, they have to be filled with something else. As joy filled the women's hearts, the fear was displaced. There it goes, running out on the ground, filling the empty space where Jesus' body had been. That same morning, the eleven disciples were too paralyzed with fear to even go to the tomb. They were in hiding, back in the upper room in Jerusalem, filled with fear of what might happen to them at the hands of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Filled with guilt and regret as how they had run away when Jesus was arrested. Filled with confusion ... we thought Jesus was the Messiah. How could we have been so wrong? It was so bad that even when they heard the news about what the women had seen and heard, they didn't believe it. They couldn't believe it. They couldn't shake off all the doubt and fear and regret that filled their hearts. The next verse tells us that Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself but even the emptiness he saw didn't convince him.

The Introit today doesn't come from one of the Psalms as it usually does. It comes from the Exodus. And from the book of Exodus it's the song that the Israelites sang after God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. It's the song they sang after God brought them through the midst of the Red Sea on dry ground and destroyed Pharaoh's pursuing army in the midst of it. There was a moment when God's Old Testament people were filled with an overwhelming fear in the face of Pharaoh's approaching army. After the signs and wonders that Moses did, after the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh finally lets the people go. They marched out in a proud and grand parade. Then Pharaoh changed his mind and sends his army after them. The people looked up and saw an approaching cloud of dust. Pharaoh's army drew near and the people cried out in fear. They were out of options. They could surrender and return as slaves, trust Pharaoh that he wouldn't just put them all to death in punishment for the havoc Moses had wrought on Egypt. Or they could swim for it and risk drowning in the Red Sea.

The common thread is the lack of faith. God's Old Testament people had witnessed great signs and wonders, but were still afraid. The disciples had watched Jesus do miracles, heal the sick, calm the storm, feed the multitudes, even raise the dead but they were still afraid too. How much like them we are. How often does our faith rely not on what God has done for us, but on what God has done for us ... lately? Then God gave his Old Testament people a third option. Rescue through the midst of the sea. He rescued them with His mighty power. He has done the same for you and me. Our options in the face of a life of temptation and sin and death would seem limited. We can live lives of slavery to sin and Satan. We can struggle and stumble through life in a broken world or we can simply give up on life. Through Jesus' cross and empty tomb, God has provided a third option, salvation through death. God's power has broken through the power of death and won the victory. Now when we pass through death we are saved.

Psalms 118:15-20: *"Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!' I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over*

*to death. Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.”*

In Baptism we are buried with Christ and raised to new life. In Christ we have a permanent solution to the enemy of death. We have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God has given us a place to escape the power of sin, death and the devil. So as the women come to the tomb and see it empty, as they hear the message of the angels, they go from worry to wonder to wow! Do you know what the empty tomb really means? Some people think it means the great hoax. The disciples have taken the body and now want us to believe that Jesus is risen, but we're not going to fall for that. The empty tomb means the gardener moved the body. That's what Mary thought. Show me where you have laid Him.

Perhaps you're not quite sure what the empty tomb means. The empty tomb means no empty promises. Jesus is alive, He is risen from the dead. The power of death has been broken. It could not hold Him. Sin has been paid for. The devil has been defeated. Believers will also rise. I believe in the resurrection of the body. The Holy Spirit will on the last day raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. Even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death that I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom. Jesus Christ has bought us with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. He suffered and died on the cross to set us free from being slaves to sin, death and the devil. He rose from the dead on the third day to confirm His promises to us.

The empty tomb means your sins are forgiven. It means the power of death has been broken. It means the devil has been defeated. The empty tomb means you have been set free. Lord Jesus, you have set me free. You have paid the price of my deliverance. You have destroyed those who have held me captive. Lord Jesus, I want to go with You. I want to be with you. I want to follow You. Beloved, the empty tomb means you have been set free. That's why we want to follow Him in this life. That's why we look forward with joy to being with Him forever. His resurrection has set us free.

Praise Him for His great deliverance. Praise Him for His grace and favour. Praise Him for His love. He is alive. The grave is empty. He is risen, He is risen indeed.