

## “Why Do You Look For The Living Among The Dead?”

Genesis 1:1-2:2, Psalm 36:5-10, Exodus 14:10-15:1,  
Ezekiel 36:24-28, Romans 6:3-11, Luke 24:1-12

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” The angels said that to the women who came seeking Jesus' body at the tomb. But the tomb was empty.

He was not there, but had been raised. That's the basis of everything for us. Had he not risen from the dead, we probably would have never heard of Him. But Jesus conquered death and the grave, and brought us to this holy night.

And here, even two thousand years later, we are challenged by the Angel's question, because this is a living Word, and Jesus speaks to us through it. We still find ourselves looking for the living among the dead.

Tonight, as we gather before the empty tomb, we rejoice to share in the finding of new life, of two adults, who have come to us from different countries, different continents, but whose story is united in Jesus. He sought them both, and they both answered his call. He stood at the door and knocked. And they have opened the door of their hearts to him. And tonight we baptize them, and welcome them into our family, into the family of God's Children throughout the world. They had been looking for life, among the dead, and did not find it there. But they have found Him here, who is the source of life and light. So we are living the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel, he said “I will gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own. . . I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.”

That new heart, and new spirit, is the new life of Jesus, that Pamela and Michael are being given tonight, and that we all are reminded of as we renew our baptismal vows and are sprinkled with Holy Water on this Holy Night. And if you're sitting close to the aisle, you will get sprinkled with Holy Water, when I come with the aspergillum after the baptisms.

This night we are reminded to stop looking for the living, among the dead. For that is

what idols are, dead things, to which we give too much glory. Why do we look for the living among the dead? The angel asks us as well, even as we stand at the empty tomb. And the answer is because that is what the world does, and what we are taught to do, from our youth. We are misled to seek our fulfillment in wealth, or in the accumulation of things. We are misled to work endless hours to get ahead, while our relationships starve for lack of our attention. We are misled to stick to shallow relationships and small talk instead of risking being vulnerable and discovering the life that truly loving relationships offer us. And even when we stop being misled by these things, sometimes we continue to seek the living among the dead, when we go about our daily lives without thought, without prayer or reflection, assuming that everything we have seen, is all there is and all there could be.

That is what happened with those women at the tomb, they were going to anoint Jesus' body in death, as was their custom, they were going to do it, because they had seen him die. And the evidence of his death, was stronger and fresher than their memories of him foretelling his resurrection. So they were going to go on with their business, as if nothing had changed. But the truth was, and is, that everything has changed.

Because of Jesus' resurrection to new life, all the old ways, which persist to this day, of competition and enmity between human beings, are false, all of those ways that tell us, we must be in it for ourselves, and not care for those around us, are lies. Because the truth is, even death cannot destroy us, and eternal life is given to those who would simply believe in Jesus, and follow him. There is no need to seek a living among the dead, because those dead things are merely idols. And we have become dead to sin, through Jesus' death, and alive to God, forever.

Why do we look for the living among the dead? Because it is easier, and safer, to believe that things have not changed. It is not easy, or safe, to lead a Christian life. We risk getting hurt when we love our neighbor as ourselves, we risk getting tired, and hurt when we work to correct injustice, we risk getting dirty, injured and hurt, in some cases, when we resist evil, because evil does not want to be resisted, not even with good. We risk rejection when we proclaim by word and example the Good news of God in Christ, because some are so opposed to the Good News, so afraid of the changes that it would mean for their lives, that they see it as bad news. And it is a challenge, a discipline, to continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers. But all these vows that we renew tonight, or that Pamela and Michael make for the first time, are what we need to do, to turn away from those idols, the false gods of this world, and to seek life, in the one true God, who became flesh, died for us, and conquered death to show us that

the very source of life will not be defeated by death. We live where life is to be found, In Jesus, rather than among the dead. That is where we place our hope. Our Archbishop of Canterbury wrote about this hope to us in his Easter Letter: “This hope is rooted in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. His rising from the dead shows the world that death does not have the last word – whether the death of love, the death of security, even physical death itself. On the first day of the week, the first day of the new creation, God walks once again in the garden and begins to re-shape the whole world of our experience and our possibilities; the Second Adam wakes under the tree of the cross and promises fresh life, freedom and forgiveness, to the entire human world.” God does this, to glorify his name. And He chooses to glorify himself through us. He says in Ezekiel, “through you I display my holiness before their eyes.” So we do not seek the living among the dead. But we strive to risk it all, and live, really live, against the powers of the world, that would encourage us to follow idols. It may not be easy, but it is also not boring, there is no more exciting life you can live than as a Christian. There is no higher calling than that given to you at your baptism.

We live through the source of life himself, who lives beyond his own death. We are renewed by his life, tonight, tomorrow and forever. And we rejoice, that this night, he has brought two more of his own, back into the arms of his love, and has given them new life with us.

*Alleluia, Christ is risen!*

*(the Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!)*