

Imagine that you are standing in a cemetery and a car pulls up to you and asks, “Can you tell me where so and so lives? The house is supposed to be right around here somewhere!” You wouldn’t know what to say, because they were looking for the living among the dead. Do you think you could ever be that lost? Probably not. This morning, in God’s Word, we see a group of women looking for Jesus in a cemetery and an angel asking them, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”**

### I.

Of course, you know the story. These women weren’t stupid or confused. They went to the place where Jesus’ body had been laid just before sundown on Friday. When they hear the angel’s question, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”** the natural answer is **“He’s not living — He is dead!”**

These women had gotten up early that morning because in love they didn’t want to leave Jesus’ body in the tomb without the complete burial preparations. On the way there, they talked about the practical problem of getting into a tomb that was sealed by a large boulder. However, when they got there, nothing was the way they thought it would be. The stone was rolled away, and inside they found grave clothes and a cloth neatly folded where his head had been—but no body. That’s when two men in shining robes—two angels—appeared and said, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”*

Don’t those words sound like a rebuke? The angel thought these women should have known better than to come to the tomb looking for a dead Jesus. Jesus had prepared them for this moment. Again and again, He had told His disciples that He was going to die and then rise. But they never understood what He was talking about. The angel was asking these women why they didn’t understand what Jesus had promised.

We might be more sympathetic to these women than the angels were. Angels are holy. They don’t know what it’s like to be wrong, to be weak in faith, or to misunderstand God. But we’re sinners. We’ve been wrong so many times in our lives about so many things, especially spiritual things, that we can totally understand why these women never grasped the promise Jesus made. After all, who comes back from the dead? It seems unfair to us to rebuke these women for having the natural reaction in a situation like this.

Still, they should have known better. The angels reminded them, *“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”* They should have trusted His promise and come to the tomb in hope. But sin and doubt ruled their minds, so they reached the tomb thinking Jesus was dead.

We identify with these humble women who truly loved their Lord. Our faith is often weak too. When we hurt, when life seems impossible, when death is looking us in the face—our own death or the death of people we love—the natural response for us is simply to try to cope. It’s natural for us to tell ourselves that death is just a part of life. We can easily leave Jesus and His promises out of the picture.

The angels owe us the same rebuke. But remember what they said in the very next breath: *“He is not here; he has risen!”* In His great love, Jesus did the impossible. He died on the cross and paid for our sin and then rose from the dead. Now death does not win in our lives. All those who die trusting in Jesus will live with Him forever—even if their faith is weak like it was for these women on that first Easter morning. Day by day, the power of the resurrection—the gospel—is a living force that changes our hearts. It is the source of strength for our faith, especially on the days when life hurts and death comes.

### II.

Does it make a difference if you look for a name on a mailbox or a tombstone? You can probably find most names in both places, but you can only visit a friend in one of those places. That’s the point the angels were making. **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” “Does it make a difference where you look for Jesus?”**

It makes all the difference in the world! When our faith is weak, when we're dissatisfied, when we feel guilty, we may look for Jesus in all the wrong places. Where are we supposed to find Jesus? We find Jesus in the gospel. We find Him in the Word that's preached and taught to us. We find Him in our Bibles. We find Him in our baptisms, which washed our sins away, and in Communion, where we receive the actual body and blood of the Lord. But that isn't the natural place that sinners look for Him. We tend to look for Him in our feelings. We feel a need to hear Him speak to us in all the little miracles that happen to us day after day.

That isn't where the angel told these women to look. He told them to remember what Jesus had said to them. So they repeated Jesus' message: "*The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.*" If the women and the disciples had understood that message, the weekend might have been easier for them to bear. But they didn't understand. They were sinners, just like we are. So when Jesus was crucified, their hearts were broken and they could find no comfort. Jesus' words were still the power of God, but His followers didn't understand them because they wanted Jesus to be something different than what He was. They didn't want to see Him as a man Who came here to die.

But my friends, that's exactly why Jesus came—to die! He came to die, because our hearts are sinful, because we look for Jesus in all the foolish places our sinful hearts tell us to. Jesus died because our faith is weak. He died because all sinful hearts deserve to die and spend eternity in hell. When He died, He paid for every sinful heart— including ours.

On Easter Sunday, Jesus rose! His resurrection is God's proof that Jesus did all that He came to do. He has paid for your sins and mine. God calls us perfect because Jesus rose. And God promised in His resurrection that we too will rise. Death cannot hold us anymore.

The angel said, "Remember what He told you." Luke says, "*Then they remembered his words.*" Suddenly, it all came flooding back to them. With this simple expression, Luke shows the power of the Holy Spirit to create, strengthen, and clarify faith. And what did they remember? They remembered the gospel, the promise of everlasting life. That's where the power is, and when these women heard it, they believed. When they remembered Jesus' promise and began to understand that He had kept it, they began to trust in all God's promises. It makes a difference where we look for Jesus.

Today, we celebrate the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty, that God rolled the stone away, that the women heard the greatest proclamation of all time: He is not here. He has risen just as He said He would. Jesus kept His promise. Because He is alive, God promises us that all our sins are wiped out and forgotten. Because He is alive, God promises us that we will live with Him forever. Because He is alive, we have a new life already here—our life of faith in Him. Enjoy that life now. Look forward to eternal life with Him! Amen.