

Advent Lutheran Church  
Easter Expectations  
April 20, 2025  
Luke 24:1-12

I wonder about your Easter expectations. Throughout the season of Lent as we drew closer to this day, what were you preparing for? Did you have specific expectations for spending time with family or friends, for Easter baskets filled with special treats, or for continuing family traditions? Or were your expectations focused on matters of faith, including this worship service?

Some folks got up very early today to attend sunrise services. While Advent hasn't offered a sunrise service in recent years, I think nearly everyone knows what to expect and that many here have attended at least one.

Amy Butler, a minister who often inspires me and who was the first woman to serve as the Senior Pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, tells a story about the tradition of an ecumenical sunrise service in the small town of Swift Creek, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

Year after year, on Easter Sunday, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists and more come together for a service at the cemetery. The service starts in the darkness of the early morning hours and everything transitions as the sun begins rising over the surrounding hills.

This year, attendance was higher than usual, and the energy from what felt like nearly every Christian in the area was unmistakable. Everyone was eager to join their voices in the familiar song, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," as the sun came up, casting a beautiful reminder of the resurrection across the morning sky.

The Lutherans led the first hymn, the Baptist preacher offered the opening prayer, and all went according to plan until it was time

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Butler. "Can I Welcome New Life?" -

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/talkwiththepreacher/2016/03/27/can-i-welcome-new-life/>

for the sermon, which had been assigned to the Methodists that particular year.

Since it was still rather dark, the Methodist pastor found a flashlight and tried to juggle it along with her sermon notes. Following the sermon someone else prayed, they sang a closing hymn, and yet another preacher offered the benediction.

When the service ended it was just as dark as when it had begun. It turned out that Easter fell early enough in March that year that daylight savings time had not yet arrived. No one had checked.

The good people of Swift Creek had come to celebrate the resurrection in the dark and now they headed back to their vehicles and their homes in the dark.

This memorable service left one of their Easter expectations unmet.

Easter expectations abound. Theirs and ours.

Perhaps some of your best Easter memories are from times when Easter unfolded in ways that defied or perhaps even demolished your expectations.

Maybe in some small ways this service of worship is not meeting your expectations. A service that began in darkness. A choir that is robed. A preacher that isn't Lutheran.

But these are small shifts from what you have long expected to what is actually happening. Imagine the experience of the women on the first Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some other women had their expectations. Their beloved Jesus had died. They were grieving, but they were also committed to serving. Very early in the morning – while it was still dark – they set out for the tomb, spices in hand.

I cannot fully enter in to their grief, but I, like you, know that grief can be all consuming. Losing someone is always hard. Losing someone who means everything often feels unbearable.

They have lost Jesus. More specifically, the one they've followed had his life cut short at just 33 years of age by a public execution. I cannot find words to adequately describe the depth and breadth of grief that they must have been feeling.

Determined to persevere these women put one foot in front of the other time and time again as they journeyed to the tomb. Maybe you imagine them sharing stories of how they came to know Jesus and how he changed their lives or perhaps you imagine them so overcome by emotion that they walk in silence, not yet able to find words.

When they arrive, the stone has been rolled away. They enter prepared to ready Jesus' body for burial. But, he isn't to be found. Jesus' body is gone!

Before they can fully process what has happened, angels appear. And they bring news that shatters any and every expectation these women had carried with them to the tomb.

They know and we know that Jesus died on the cross and was placed in the tomb.

They know and we know that unless Jesus' body is treated with spices soon the smell will be unbearable.

They know and we know that dead people stay dead.

These angels appearing as men in dazzling clothes speak words that are hard to process and that will soon be labeled by some of Jesus closest followers as nonsense – as an idle or foolish tale.

Listen, as if for the first time – as if from the vantage of the women – as these messengers deliver news that changes everything:

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

He is not here; he has risen! 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.' "<sup>2</sup>

Did you hear that? Can you comprehend it?

A contemporary translation puts it much more directly:

"Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery?"<sup>3</sup>

Siblings in Christ, Jesus was dead. Jesus was resurrected. And, now, Jesus is very much alive again.

The women are amazed. They remember Jesus' words. Then they race to tell the news to the eleven and all of the others who are gathered.

The Resurrection is real. And, it is also really difficult for many to hear – this is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago.

I don't know about you, but I'm ready to forgo my Easter expectations to simply rejoice.

Jesus is Risen. He is risen indeed!

When I outlined all the worship services for Lent and Easter several months ago, I titled today's message "Listen to the Women." I did that because it is a critical element of the Easter story and of our ongoing Easter experiences.

Here at Advent Lutheran Church we are blessed with an abundance of preachers. During Lent we listened to the women, hearing sermons from Delaney, Jeannie, Lisa, Lynda, and Pr. Kelsey and children's messages from Emma, Greta, and Phoebe.

This morning, I started with a story told by Pr. Amy. Now I conclude with a story from Sarah Lund. At the time of this story,

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:5-7, NIV

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:5, The Message

Pr. Sarah was serving in a role with the Synod and her son was three years old.<sup>4</sup>

Her family went to church on Easter for a special worship service where she learned more about her son's big expectations.

Pr. Sarah writes, "Before entering the sanctuary, he knelt at the wire cross filled with flowers, took a yellow carnation from the white plastic bucket sitting on the ground, and added the flower to the cross. Then he yelled out, "I don't see Jesus!"

Sitting in church as worship started, I whispered in his ear, "Jesus is in your heart." He quickly replied, "But he's too big for my heart."<sup>5</sup>

Whether you are 3 years old or 103 or somewhere in between, deep down you know he's right.

Jesus is bigger than our hearts. He cannot be reduced to something we feel on occasion.

Jesus is greater than death. He will not remain in a tomb.

Jesus goes beyond all of our Easter expectations.

Now, like the women, let us go and tell others.

And, as we do, may we live as resurrection people = people of hope, of joy, and of life that never ends.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Lund was serving the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ, that denomination's middle judicatory body that is known as a Conference in their polity, but called a Synod in the ELCA.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Lund. "The Secret Message of Easter." - <http://sarahgriffithlund.com/2014/04/16/easter-hope-hunt>