

Chuck Blaisdell, Sr. Pastor  
First Christian Church  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
March 27, 2016 Easter  
©2016

## Not Here

Luke 24:1 12 The Message At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus. They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?" Then they remembered Jesus' words. They left the tomb and broke the news of all this to the Eleven and the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them kept telling these things to the apostles, but the apostles didn't believe a word of it, thought they were making it all up. But Peter jumped to his feet and ran to the tomb. He stooped to look in and saw a few grave clothes, that's all. He walked away puzzled, shaking his head.

"Not here." **Not here.** Two little words, but, oh, what emotions they can generate. On a busy workday morning when you can't find your keys: "I just can't find them. They're **not here.**" And then you mutter or shout a few words that would not be PG-rated. Or at the doctor's office when you get the results of that follow-up lab work that had you so very scared: "We thought we saw a tumor, but your latest test shows it's **not here.**" And the rush of adrenalin you feel and the tears that spring to your eyes threaten to overwhelm you. Or to your spouse at a very crowded amusement park when your three-year-old has gone missing: "I thought he was with you!" "No, I thought he was with YOU!" He's **not here.**" And your stomach clenches and a feeling of panic washes over you like nothing you've ever felt before.

"Not here." **Not here.** Of course, it's often the littlest words in life that sometimes have the biggest consequences. When you were a teenager and you oh-

so-wanted someone to be your boyfriend or girlfriend and then he or she uses that littlest of words to dash that hope: “**But** – I want to be just friends.” If you are a parent, you know the power of those tiny words “Mama” or “Dada” the first time your little one says them to you and you thought you knew what happiness was but you realize that you really didn’t until now. Or maybe it’s one of those little words that writer Anne Lamott says express the essence of most of our prayers: “Help,” “thanks,” “wow!” and which somehow open you up to new life, new hope, new appreciation. Or maybe it’s that little word “sorry” that sometimes seems so very hard to say but which can be utterly necessary to say when you and your spouse or partner have inexplicably found an argument that started over nothing has now escalated to something very hurtful.

Yes, it’s the littlest of words that sometimes have the greatest impact and import. The Easter story itself, the story we heard read this morning, the story we have anticipated all through this long and poignant week, could itself be summed up by those two little words: “Not here.” Not here. And on this Easter morning what strikes me is the connection between those words and freedom. What do I mean? Well, this week as Palm Sunday moved into the poignancy and sadness of the last supper and the horrors of Good Friday, you and I have been made all-too-aware of the ways that we too have betrayed Jesus: those times when we went for the slashing, hurtful word when Jesus asked us to find a way to use words which built up and showed love. Those times when out of fear we labeled this or that group of people as “different,” as folks to be shamed or marginalized. Those times when out of our anxiety we betrayed the Jesus who said in so many ways “Be not afraid” by settling for mediocrity instead of the best God called us to be, or fastening onto over-simple slogan-slinging pseudo-

certainties. Those times when we have betrayed the Jesus who told us to have a child-like awe-filled faith by instead choosing to be cynical and suspicious. Those times when we have betrayed the Jesus who reached out to Samaritans and tax collectors by valuing our “own kind” more and demonizing and dehumanizing those who are “the other.” Those times we have betrayed the Jesus who began his life as a refugee from terror by slamming the door on those folks who so desperately seek the simple safeties of shelter and hope.

But the good news this morning, the good news of Easter, is that Jesus is not here in the midst of those things. We have all known those folks who never let us forget a misstep, a mistake, a misjudgment. We have known those people who can't seem to let a hurt we did them ever heal and who throw it back at us even years later. Maybe we have **been** those people. Maybe we have held on to a resentment like a badge of honor, polishing it, never letting it out of our sight, even though Anne Lamott rightly says that holding on to anger and resentment is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die. The good news this morning is that Jesus is not here. He is not those people. He is not holding on to the anger and disappointment that you may have caused. He is not here. He is not, as one of my 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers always threatened, writing something in your permanent record. No. He is not here.

The Good News of Easter morning is that the tomb was empty. The ways and wages of sin and death are not the final thing and cannot hold Jesus. The Good News of Easter is, then, that they need not hold us either. The invitation of that empty tomb is for you to be freed of what has held you down, held you back, held you up. The invitation of that empty tomb is for you to be freed from dwelling on the mistakes you

have made, the hurts you have inflicted or those inflicted on you, the habits that have trapped you in a grave of lost hopes. The invitation of that empty tomb is to know, even through our tear-stained eyes this morning in the face of the death of one so dear to us that God suffers nothing to be lost and that God keeps and loves and cherishes everyone he has made safely and forevermore.

He is not here. No, as the gospels of Mark and Matthew tell the story of this day, Jesus has gone on ahead to Galilee. Can you see him standing there waving at you, beckoning you to join him? Can you see him offering you a way out of whatever morass has mired you, whatever terror has trapped you, whatever anxiety has enervated and drained you? He is not here. No, he is calling your name from the future, a future that can be hopeful and healing. For you see, the God whom we worship and the Son whom he sent are always and ever about the business of hope and healing. They are not about joyless judgmentalism, they are not about keeping score and seeing if you make the cut. The cross was not about an angry God and a need to somehow appease that God. Such a view makes God into a monster. No, the cross was about the worst that **humanity** can do and about how God can and does triumph over despair, defeat, and death, about how God is ever and always a God who offers you the invitation to freedom, to a new beginning, to new hope, to new and reborn life. Jesus is not here; no, he's beckoning you to put aside and be freed from all that has hurt and maimed and join in sharing that good news in Galilee and into the whole world.

Which leaves you and me with a choice. We can be like Peter in this morning's scripture, silently puzzled, silently shaking our heads and slinking back into those ways

that have kept us in bondage. Or we can be like those women who ran from that tomb singing and shouting the Good News that He is not here, he is alive – and we can be too, we can be too. Which will you choose? ? Shall we slink back into old ways that keep us down? Or shall we leave this service, unfettered and free, ready to share with everyone the joyful Good News message - Not Here! Not Here! Christ is Risen! Christ is risen indeed!