



## April 21, 2019 Remember His Word, An Easter Message

Given by Rev. Mattei

### [Lk 24:1-12](#)

Tombs are sites of memory (in the Greek gospel, “a sign of remembrance”, *mnema*). There, we remember our loved ones, evoke stories, feel connected in love and keep those who have died present in our lives. Throughout the world there are customs and practices that we associate with death, such as bringing flowers or a cup of rice to the tomb at the time of visitation, wearing black for a period of time and so on<sup>1</sup>. Such customs and practices provide a visceral way for us to honor the dead and give expression to our grief. They train our memory to recall stories of the one who has died. Grief may be heavy at times and access to memories may be denied at first, blurred as they are by shock and disorientation.

The women who followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem had watched as the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross. They watched as Joseph of Arimathea took the body, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb hewed from the rock where no other body had previously been laid. They went home to prepare spices that would be needed to complete the proper burial of the body ([Lk 23:50-56](#)). As the Sabbath Day is over, the women come to the tomb (Luke 24:1), intending to perform the customary rituals for a dead body and bringing closure to grief. But as they approach, they find the stone covering the entrance to the tomb has been rolled back. And when they enter the tomb, they do not find the body of Jesus. The reality the women expect is not the reality they encounter. They are perplexed, at a loss to make sense of the disconnection between their expectations and what they find.

In Luke, the two heavenly figures ask the women a question “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.” Then they add: “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again.” They have come to the tomb expecting to find the dead because that is the function of tombs: to house the dead. What they discover is that the “tomb” is now an empty tomb. It is a familiar sign transformed by resurrection. Nonetheless, the now empty tomb continues to function as a place that evokes memories. And this is precisely what the heavenly beings invite the women to do: to remember “how he told you.”

In several occasions, Jesus tells his disciples of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection ([Lk 9:18-22](#); [Lk 9:37-44](#); [Lk 18:31-34](#)). Peter and the other disciples hear all three of Jesus’

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/11-fascinating-funeral-traditions-from-around-the-globe/>;

predictions, yet by the time the women tell them about the empty tomb, they have apparently forgotten. They don't believe the women's testimony that Jesus has risen from the dead. The women don't remember Jesus' predictions at first, either. Perhaps the shock has numbed their senses, for they too need to be reminded by the two figures in dazzling robes. "Then they remembered his words," Luke informs us.

Perhaps when Jesus tried earlier to tell them what was going to happen, the prospect of his suffering and death was too horrible for them to grasp, the thought of his resurrection too impossible. Perhaps the disciples were too concerned with the crowd's opinion, or too preoccupied with who among them would be the greatest, an argument that keeps on resurfacing ([Lk 9:46-48](#); [Lk 22:24](#)). They needed to be reminded again and again. Such a repetition to refer back to what Jesus said, to the Word, reveals a pattern in which understanding comes through proclamation. Hearing the Word again through the words of the heavenly beings, the women do remember (24:8). And, of their own initiative, they immediately seek out the disciples to, in turn, proclaim to them what they have seen and heard. They have progressed from grief to peace, from hopelessness to renewed joy, from death to life.

We also need to remember. Yet, we might protest, how could we possibly forget what has been proclaimed for the last two thousand years? First of all, who doesn't need to hear the proclamation of new life that comes through Jesus' death and resurrection. Secondly, do we know and remember the death and resurrection of Jesus so profoundly that they shape the way we live each day?

The Word of God is the Word that God spoke at the time of creation and all came into Life; a Word that declares all things "good" and speaks "truth" to all things (Jn 14:17; It is the creative Love that renews all things ([Is 43:19](#); [2 Cor 5:17](#); [Rev 21:5](#)). That Word, that Life, that Love we learn to appreciate and live by. That Word we lift up high for all to see, in a Sacred Book we carry in procession, and in our sacred lives as we make choices that honor life and resist evil.

When we decide to start the sacred journey, we put on Christ; we are his and soon realize nothing can separate us from his love, not our selfishness, not our guilt and shame, not our sense of inadequacy, not our fears and not even our evil intent. Once we decide to follow him, he will not let go of us. We may be able to keep him at bay for a period of time, maybe even for the whole extent of our earthly life, but when we will be face to face with him, will we be foolish enough to say "No, thank you"? So it is in this life we want to learn to walk on the path Jesus has traced for us. It's in this life we want to train to die to our selfishness, to live by his values and face a happy death. With the Word of God in our hearts, we are well on our way to resurrection. The seed of resurrection love was already visible in the Good Friday crucifixion. No evil can control and suppress love. What we are asked to do is simply to remember his words and believe them. Then proclaiming his resurrection in our life will be a matter of fact.