

Easter Sunday C, 2013

Text: Luke 24:1-12

Title: An Easter Surprise

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Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Do you like surprises? When was the last time you were really surprised, the last time someone “got you good”?

Last October we tried to surprise my wife on her birthday. It didn’t work that well. She could tell that something was up.

When’s the last time you were surprised?

Was it on a birthday or anniversary? Maybe you were surprised by a gift you weren’t expecting or a job offer when you had given up hope of finding anything. Maybe you won a contest or a raffle prize. Maybe you were surprised by a marriage proposal or when you found out you were having a baby or a grandchild.

Surprises are great because they go beyond our expectations. They are blessings more than we expect to receive.

I’m a pessimist. I always expect the worst. That way, I’m always ready to be surprised by good news. If you’re an optimist, then the only surprises are when things go wrong.

Now Easter is a day full of surprises. Not just what’s in the Easter basket or who turns up in church, but bigger, greater surprises than that. I’d like to focus on just three surprises this Easter morning: three big surprises.

The first surprise came when the women arrived at the tomb.

They came expecting to find a dead body. They expected to find Jesus, or what was left of him after the torture of Friday morning and afternoon. They had spent Friday night and all day on Saturday resting for the Sabbath, and so at first light they headed to the tomb to finish the job of preparing Jesus for burial.

They expect to find a dead body. But what do they find instead? An empty tomb. Nothing.

Imagine if one of your loved ones had died. And you show up to the wake. And as you go up to the casket and look inside, you find it empty.

Imagine how surprised you'd be. Imagine what you'd have to say to the folks at the funeral home. You'd probably think that there had been some sort of mistake, some sort of mix up, and you'd be upset and angry that the body wasn't there.

Luke tells us that when the woman saw the empty tomb "they were greatly perplexed." This word means that they were at a total loss for words. They were so shocked and surprised, they didn't know what to say. They thought that someone had taken Jesus' body away, that someone was playing a cruel trick on them.

This was not a happy surprise at first, and not all surprises are happy. Sometimes we get bad news that surprises us. Sometimes the surprise comes in the form of a pink slip, a break-up, or bad test results. Sometimes the surprise just knocks the wind out of you and you don't even know what to say or how to respond.

That's the first surprise of Easter, that the tomb is empty.

But thankfully, there are better surprises that lay ahead.

The second surprise is that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. That's the reason why His body is not there in the tomb.

The angels tell the women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

Jesus' resurrection shouldn't have been a surprise. He talked about it with His disciples. He told them that He would die and rise again on the third day.

But that was just so crazy, so unbelievably absurd that they didn't believe it possible.

And so when they hear the news they are surprised.

You've heard this news before, I'm sure. It's probably not a big surprise to you. You came here knowing that Jesus would rise from the dead.

But imagine hearing about it for the first time. Imagine hearing that Jesus Christ had come back to life, that your good friend was alive for the first time.

There's nothing more devastating than when a loved one dies. Even if you know it's coming, even if it means an end to their pain and suffering, it's still painful. You want nothing more than to see them one more time, to hear their voice, see their face and just enjoy their presence.

Jesus' friends get this wish. He comes back to life and comes for them. He doesn't go straight to heaven, but he stays here on earth for forty days to comfort and encourage His disciples and friends. What a wonderful surprise.

The last surprise is the best of all. This third surprise comes from St. Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians.

Now some of the folks in Corinth thought that this life was all there was, that once you die it's all over.

And Paul says to them, "No, there's more. Jesus rose, and you will rise, too!" Easter is not just about Jesus' resurrection, but it's about your resurrection, too.

The final surprise of Easter is that you get to rise again, too, just like Jesus, that you're invited to the party that Isaiah describes, a new heavens and a new earth, no more weeping, only joy, peace and prosperity for all, for you.

You don't deserve any of this, you shouldn't expect it. We should only expect punishment from God, because that's all we deserve.

Instead, we're surprised by His love and forgiveness. We're surprised that He doesn't turn His back on us, but He turns His face towards us in love, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

You have been united with Jesus in your baptism. Because He rose, you will rise, too.

You are united with Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Because He rose, you will rise, too.

That's the greatest surprise of Easter, that death will not be end for you or anyone who is in Christ, that Jesus has won the victory over sin and Satan once and for all, that you can face death confident that because Jesus rose, you will rise, too.

And the surprises don't end with Easter Sunday, but continue on week after week.

Next week the disciples will be surprised when Jesus just shows up in the upper room with them. They're hiding in fear with the doors locked, and then, "boom," there he is.

The week after the disciples will be surprised again as the fish all night without catching a thing, but then when Jesus tells them to try the other side of the boat they catch so many fish that they can't handle them all.

Then we hit Pentecost and the surprise of the Holy Spirit, inspiring the disciples to be bold witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus has more surprises lined up for you, too. Every day there are new blessings, new surprises as He gives you gifts that go beyond your expectations.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!