

Opening

- 30 years ago, I was standing in a room at Lawrence Memorial Hospital, visiting my maternal grandparents.
 - o My grandfather was dying of cancer.
 - The disease had progressed to the point that it had taken him out of consciousness and he was near death.
 - I was feeling pretty helpless- I'd have given anything to change the situation, but my grandfather was dying and I could do nothing about it.
 - o My grandmother and I were chatting about the good times we had, camping and fishing- all the family celebrations- great, great times.
- As we talked, my grandmother looked up at me and said "I sure wish we could take you boys camping just one more time."
 - o It was more than I could handle.
 - o The camping trips- the fishing- the laughter and good times.
 - The helpless feeling- lost hope- it all came rushing in on me
 - The finality of death was settling in.
 - Pain had seized my heart and crushed it.
 - And I simply wept.
 - o I turned away from my grandmother, not wanting her to see her grandson, now a grown man, weeping like a small child.
- After a short while, I regained my composure, I looked at my grandmother and said "I'm sorry".
 - o Through tears of her own she said, "It's OK to cry. I cry too. Sometimes there's nothing left to do but cry."

A visit to the cemetery

- Just a few years later, those words would revisit me as I stood before their graves.
- My parents and I would regularly make a trip to the cemetery to visit the graves of past family.
 - o Whenever we went, we would always "spruce" things up.

- Mom would take flowers, to decorate and dad would take his clippers and gardening gloves, so he could trim the grass around the headstones.
- After we'd finished our work, Mom and Dad would take some time to look at the graves and reminisce about the experiences they had shared with these departed loved ones.
 - Mom would sometimes cry and dad would put his arm around her and comfort her.
 - And those words my grandmother had long-since spoken, would resonate in me.
 - Sometimes there's nothing left to do but cry.

How it was for Mary Magdalene and the others

- Do you suppose that is how it was for Mary Magdalene and the others, who accompanied her on her way to the tomb where Jesus was buried?
 - Just a few days earlier, they stood by helplessly, as Jesus was stripped of his clothes, nailed to a cross, raised up and left die in one of the most painful ways one can die.
- It must have been more than they could handle- the miracles, the good times with Jesus, the love and acceptance he gave to them.
 - The helpless feeling- the lost hope- the finality of his death.
 - The worst thing that could have happened, happened.
 - Jesus was dead and that was that
 - There was nothing left to do but to cry.
- Now it was Sunday—three days had past—and Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the other women had come to the tomb where Jesus was laid.
 - They had come to honor their dead friend- they came looking for the dead.
- We ourselves go to the cemetery for much the same reason.
 - We visit the graves of those who have gone before us to honor their memory.
 - We “spruce up” things a bit, stand and reminisce about what once was, we cry a little and then we go on our way.
- I suppose this is what Mary and the other women thought they would be doing as they went to visit Jesus' tomb on that FIRST Easter Sunday.
 - They expected to preserve his body with the spices and perfumes they had prepared.

- They expected to reminisce about the life they had shared with him.
 - They expected to cry, and to comfort one another.
 - They expected to “spruce-up” things a little bit and then go their way.

Looking for the living among the dead

- **But it wasn't to be!**
- When the women arrived to the tomb, the stone had been rolled away, and Jesus' body was not inside.
 - For a moment, they didn't know what to make of it- they were confused.
 - Jesus was dead- where could his body be?
 - They were sure he was dead- they were all there when he was nailed to the cross, and they watched as he died a slow, agonizing death.
 - They were there when darkness came over the land that afternoon.
 - They remembered how the earth shook and the rocks were split when Jesus breathed his last breath.
 - Jesus was dead, all right.
- Then suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes appeared beside them and asked, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”
 - **“He is not here, but has RISEN.”**
- These women had come looking for the dead, but instead they found an empty tomb!
 - And now they have been told that Jesus is alive!
 - Can you believe it?!
 - The worst day of their lives wasn't the last day of their lives, after all. <PAUSE>
- Now, I know that you and I- we don't look for the living among the dead, do we?
 - We don't go to the cemetery expecting to find the living among the dead.
 - And whenever we talk about our life experiences with loved ones who have died, we generally refer to them in the past tense.
 - And that's as it should be, I suppose, just as long as we remember that because of what God did through Jesus on that FIRST Easter morning, death no longer has the final word.
- You see, even as we visit the cemetery to remember those who have gone before us, we have Jesus' assurance that they are not just dead and gone- once and for all.

- Jesus' resurrection means that our loved ones who have passed are not merely remembrances of another time.
 - They are not just an echo from our past, which visit our memories from time-to-time.
 - Because of what God did through Jesus, these loved ones are better thought of as members of the saints in light, who are on the next part of their journey.
 - And on their journey, they carry part of us with them and they continue to speak to us.
 - And as our journey continues, we carry part of them with us and we still speak to them.
 - That is the promise of Easter- it is the HOPE offered to us in the resurrection.
 - Because of what God did through the resurrection of Jesus, we have confidence that the worst day of our lives, is not the final day of our lives

Do we look for Jesus among the living?

- Jesus died over two thousand years ago.
- And even though we believe in the resurrection, most of us still find it hard NOT to think of him as simply dead and gone.
 - We tend to use the past tense when we talk about Jesus, instead of talking about him in the context of what he is doing today, right now, in our lives.
 - We read about Jesus as history.
 - And when we talk about him, it is as though we are still visiting his grave.
- Why are we looking for the living among the dead?
- Maybe what we need is a visit from those two men in dazzling clothes, to tell us what they told the women at the tomb.
 - "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."
 - Maybe then, we will remember that the tomb really was empty!
 - Maybe then, we will remember that God really did resurrect Jesus.
 - Maybe then, we will remember how the resurrection was a new beginning for Jesus.
 - A new beginning for the whole world.

- A new beginning for our loved ones.
- A new beginning for us. **<PAUSE>**

Wrap it up

- And maybe then, we will remember that there is still much to be done.
 - When the women in this story got to Jesus' tomb, he was not there.
 - He had been resurrected, and he had already moved on.
 - Gone on ahead of his disciples, once again calling them to follow him to Galilee, where he would meet them.
- Friends, Jesus is no longer in the tomb. **Jesus is ALIVE, Halleluiah!**
 - And Jesus goes ahead of us, too, calling us to follow him.
 - Calling us to love God, by loving our neighbor.
 - Calling us to live with purpose- to follow him and do as he does.
 - And there are hungry people to be fed;
 - Sick people to be healed and made whole;
 - Homeless people to be sheltered;
 - Naked and half-naked people to be clothed;
 - Oppressed people to be freed;
 - Prisoners- and home-bound people to be visited;
 - Peace to be made!
 - It is in doing these things- that we truly live with purpose.
 - And it is there where we will find Jesus.
- Jesus is not found among the dead.
- Jesus is to be found among the living!
- May we find him there this day.
- Amen and Amen!