

We gather today in the midst of life. We gather in all kinds of circumstances. Sometimes life's circumstances can be great. Everything seems to go well. You feel blessed and thankful.

Other times, though, circumstances can fog your faith. It can be as big as a tragedy, like an unexpected illness or death of a friend or family member, or a tornado ravages your home, like happened in Glenn Heights the day after Christmas last year. Your life unexpectedly changed and you have a major adjustment. Or it might be a small setback and you are disappointed.

You might not get that job you wanted or accepted into the college of your choice or your boyfriend or girlfriend broke up with you, or a favorite project fell through. Perhaps you've been praying and the prayer goes unanswered for months and months, and you wonder, why should I pray? Is God even there?

Circumstances can sometimes be great and other times they can rattle you. Tough ones can unseat your faith. Sometimes just the smallest things can make you wonder, *Does God care? Where is Jesus when I need him?*

Perhaps something that has happened to you causes you confusion. It might have caused you to stay away from church for a while. It might have given you a reluctance to pray for what you need for a while. Perhaps you have pushed God away for a long time.

During this Holy Week so long ago, unexpected circumstances came about that threw the disciples and friends of Jesus into great turmoil. They had heard him talk about it but they didn't really believe something so horrible could happen, so they just kind of ignored it. Then when it did happen all the disciples ran, out of fear. They deserted him. It turned their world upside down. It was hard to take the loss.

There was the day of the crucifixion, then the day of silence; then Sunday the sun came up. All this time, to their credit, they stayed together with each other. And you know they kept talking about it.

It's cathartic to be with your closest friends and tell the story over and over again.

Two days passed. Jesus was dead. It was agony as they realized the movement seemed to have failed. No kingdom of Israel would be established. No more being with their beloved Rabbi, listening to his teaching, asking him questions about life, watching him open blind eyes and straighten crippled legs, and feed thousands of people from virtually nothing. No more seeing his passionate zeal at the temple as he cleared it so people could pray.

No more being the center of attention because they were his disciples and he helped them do what he himself did. Their hopes were dashed; their reputations ruined.

What could they do? What would you do in the silence? They had to wait an entire day and two nights in that silent, seeming failure.

I remember going out to Glenn Heights to inspect the damage. Because of the generosity of someone from Houston, we had money to give, and we searched for a believer and found

Roberta Moses. Her house was severely damaged, and there was that silence between the storm and when the repairs began. You just had to wait. You might have been sad or mad or full of faith, but nothing could change the waiting.

Well, some of the women said to each other—let's go take care of his body. That's something we can do. We'll honor his memory that way. So they went. But low and behold, the stone was rolled away, and his body was gone. Before they could answer the question—*'what in the world . . . where is the body?'*—two men, obviously from out of this world, appeared with a question:

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

I wonder if they stopped to ponder the loaded question.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's 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 into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

*Then they remembered he had said this.*

All the spices were not needed! Do you think they left them? Do you think they saved them to help them seal that moment in their minds forever? He had said it would be okay! He had said he would rise from the dead! Perhaps the women placed the unused burial spices on their mantles. When things go wrong I look up on the mantle where I placed them and remember the day these burial spices were not needed because He is risen!

Did you come here today with a problem? Maybe not this year! But if you do have a problem, whether it is ongoing or was a one-time event, problems make it seem like Jesus is not among the living. He hasn't answered, so you considered him among the dead.

But ponder the question, *"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"* Jesus can take any tragedy and bring something vibrant and living out of it. Jesus can take your current problem, your ongoing, unanswered concern and infuse it with life, his life. No matter what it is or who caused it.

Don't consider Jesus dead any longer, or not powerful, or not here. Remember what He said: "On the third day I will rise from the dead." No matter what your concern is; no matter how impossible it looks, Jesus is among the living!

The women RUSHED BACK to tell the eleven men and everyone else, but it sounded like nonsense, because they considered him dead. And that's easy to do after seeing a crucifixion of who they loved best. Then they had to wait two whole nights and one entire day, until the third day. So they did not believe the women.

It hadn't sunk in, but it will if *we remember his words.*

Then Peter, the one who had failed him by denying him three times had a spark of life. He ran to the tomb, peered in, and saw the strips of linen that Jesus had laid aside.

He went away wondering to himself what happened...

You have heard his story. And you will hear the rest of it at 10:30 in our Grand Story of Jesus' Resurrection Appearances. But here's the question his story asks of you. Are you still wandering away, wondering to yourself what became of Jesus? Are you considering your problem and thinking Jesus is still among the dead? Or do you remember his words and cling to him in the joy of hope?

Will you invite the living Lord into your circumstances today?

It is a reality. Make it your reality. HE IS RISEN!

AMEN