

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy and wise. A piece of wisdom that Benjamin Franklin composed for the ages. Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy and wise.

But on that morning about seventeen hundred years before Franklin was born the women rose early seeking neither, health nor wealth nor wisdom. They came instead to do the duty of the closest relative, the duty of sister or wife or mother, bringing spices for the body of Jesus. Were they up early that day – before the sun had risen – because they wanted to do their work before the heat of the day added to the stench of his rotting corpse? Were they on the way to the tomb at early dawn because there had been no sleep for them all night? Had they tossed and turned with images of their beloved Jesus being nailed to the cross? Did the songs of his tormenters race round and round in their minds? Were thoughts of what could have been and might have been and should have been holding their sleep captive? Whatever the reason they arrived at the tomb at early dawn.

The stone was rolled away. They wondered about this – it was not what they expected. Suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but he has risen. 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."* Then they remembered his words.

It is like these words of Jesus were asleep in them – these words promising life on the third day or had gotten lost in a forgotten file folder in their minds. It is funny how some words stay right on the desktop of our minds -

words that bring fear or anxiety or despair - words of criticism or accusation or blame - words that remind us of troubles that are right on the horizon. But once the women were reminded, Jesus' words were awakened in them. They remembered.

*The women went and told the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe.* Jesus was alive whether they believed it or not. He had taken the sin of the world upon himself and carried it all down into death. He had begun God's work of destroying death – the last enemy of God that will one day be buried forever. Jesus was alive and sorrow was turned to joy but for the apostles these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe.

But it would not be long before they would believe. Jesus would appear to them later that day – invite them to touch him. After the day of Pentecost, fifty days later, the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be filling the world with the word of Jesus' resurrection. But on that Easter morning though Jesus was alive they did not believe.

On this Easter morning nearly two thousand years later the situation is the same: some of us believe the words of the messengers of God – some of us are gathering weekly to be reminded of Jesus' words. Some of us are keeping those words right in the forefront of our minds the whole week through. And some of us are thinking these words an idle tale.

We all live by words - some by words of human wisdom like the words of Benjamin Franklin - some by words of Country and Western singers or rap artists - some by words of politicians or historians or teachers - some by words a mother or a father speaks or words of friends. And these words shape our hope and fears, our joys and our sorrows.

God wants you to live by God's word for God's word is an eternal word. Learn from Benjamin Franklin and you may indeed be healthy and wealthy and wise in this life. Live by faith in Jesus and your life will be eternal. Even through suffering and death he will be alive in you for he is alive forevermore.

Live each day with the word of his love and his forgiveness on your mind. Let his word fill your heart with hope and with peace. Trust in his promise that with God all things are possible.

Will you be spared sorrow if you do? No, no more than Christ was spared the cross. But you can rest in peace with the assurance that he will raise you out of every sorrow and will lift you out of anxiety and fear and hold you in his hands through every night of storm and darkness. And one day your grave will be empty too.

Happy Easter.