

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 24:1-12
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 April 16, 2017

KIDS' MESSAGE

Read "**The Empty Tomb**" from Spark Story Bible, p. 482-485.

Tissue Box – Pull it out! Another one! Again and again, we watch as each new tissue is pulled out of this box. It's not magic. There are 200 tissues in this box. Pull out one and it brings the next one with it. Tissues are good when you have a cold.

But, look again and think of Easter. Jesus rose from the grave, came out of that cold, dark box – just like tissue comes out of this box. He was killed, buried and then he rose, alive again. God brought Jesus out of the grave.

Great! But, that's not all that happened. Jesus did it for us. For you and your family. God opened the door to Jesus' grave and to every grave. Jesus rose and therefore, so can we!

We are like the tissues in this box. Jesus rose first and then Jesus brought us out with him. Each of us will die someday, but, because Jesus came to claim us as children of God, and because Jesus promised never to let us go – we too will rise again after we die and then go to live with God in heaven forever!

Next time you use a tissue, remember that Jesus came out of the grave alive and that when you die, Jesus will help you to do the same! Thank you Jesus! Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

The "**Divine But.**" Our Easter Gospel text has **12 verses** and **6 "buts," b-u-t.** Any time a word occurs a couple of times in a scripture text, it is worth special notice. When a word appears multiple times, it is big, very big. Two thousand years ago, for that handful of ancient followers of Jesus, **all hope was gone.** **All dreams were dashed.** Their beloved Jesus had been brutally beaten, nailed to a cross and was now lying dead in a borrowed tomb. In the face of all that was **hopeless and forlorn,** in the face of all that was **fearful and dangerous,** in the **once-again-perceived reality** that the **powers of this world always have their way**

over the masses – **God plants 6 buts**. Do you know anything about **danger**, **hopelessness** or **powerful people controlling** your life or world?

Our Gospel text picks up at **Luke 24:1**. Immediately before this passage, we are told that Jesus is dead, wrapped in a linen cloth and laid in a tomb. It was Friday. The women who had supported Jesus and the twelve disciples, all along, came to see where Jesus' body was and then went home to prepare burial spices and ointments. The next day, the Sabbath, Saturday, they rested at home, "**according to the commandment**," with plans to return to the grave on Sunday to do right by Jesus' dead body.

God had something else in mind – the **Divine But**. Those women **knew that Jesus was dead**, yet our text begins, "**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb** (here it comes) **but when they went in, they did not find the body.**"

"**While they were perplexed** (that's another kind of a **but word** - everything seems to be backwards, doesn't make sense, where is Jesus' body?), **perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.**" Oh, oh. . . "**The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground**" (Jesus is supposed to be dead and buried, he seems to be gone and here are these two frightening creatures!) "**but the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.'**" Their world **seems to be this way**, **but** God says it is the **other way**.

Then these angels go on to explain things to the women. "**Remember how he told you... that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.**" And the women "**remembered.**" **Remember, Jesus promised that death is not the last word! He's not dead any more!** Then the women left the tomb and **went back and told** the eleven disciples, who were still hiding behind locked doors, for fear of their own death, **that Jesus was alive!**

Another “**But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.**” And another “**But Peter** (doubting, denying, hiding 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.**” It’s really not very clear whether Peter believed or not. . . . But, it sounds like he did. Later, Peter boldly told the tale to the world.

These Easter verses recount the moment when **our most basic assumptions about life, death, power and hope are rewritten.** Can humans **believe the unbelievable?** Did Jesus, God’s own Son, our Brother, rise from the dead? Did Jesus come back and go to work to claim every single person here as a precious and beloved child of God? Look around in your life and world and it **might look like the powers of sin, death and evil win every battle. But not in God’s book.** Not if Jesus conquered death. Not if Jesus lives, and moves and is here with us now.

Your dream marriage may have ended in **divorce, but** that doesn’t mean that God can’t help you to build a new dream and rediscover love, joy and new adventure in your life. You may be **addicted** to alcohol, drugs, gambling, food or a host of other things, **but** that doesn’t mean that God can’t set you free from those false gods and lift you to a better place than you may ever have been. Your **kids may all live in distant cities** and rarely make it home, **but** that doesn’t mean that God can’t help your family to grow ever closer and fonder in the years ahead. You may have been **badly neglected or abused** as a child, but that doesn’t mean that God can’t help you to raise your children to know a degree of love and caring like none other. You may be **battling death-dealing cancer**, or dementia, or Parkinson’s disease, diabetes or mental illness, **but** that doesn’t mean God can’t help you to live each and every day to the fullest in God’s loving embrace and in the embrace of your family, friends and church family. And if Jesus rose, **you may die, but that’s not the end of God’s story for you either.**

I had a **dream** a few days ago. I found myself sitting in the sanctuary at Lord of Life Lutheran where I was a pastor before coming to Aitkin. It was different however, since I seemed to be in a side wing from which I could not see the front of the sanctuary. I could hear the contemporary band playing though. All of a sudden I noticed who was sitting next to me. It

was **Gus Augustinack**. Gus was the drummer in that group. He loved to play for worship. He and I were long time friends. Gus died. I knew that in my dream and determined that this must be a **special visit**. Gus and I quietly said "**Hello**." He said, "**How long has it been, a year?**" I realized he was talking about his death. I responded, "**Oh, no, Gus. I think it's been longer than that**." I tried to figure in my head and decided that it must have been at least two years. In reality, it has been five years since my good friend, Gus, died. Next I thought of the great family reunion at the end of time and, tears in my eyes, I said to him, "**It won't be long, Gus**." I was thinking of the day when Jesus comes again. "**It won't be long, Gus**." In my dream, Gus didn't have tears in his eyes, but when I woke up, there were still tears in mine.

As I lay there in bed, I thought back to Gus and several other friends who have died since I left Lord of Life. The Friday Morning Men's Breakfast Group at Lord of Life painted their names on a chair that they use each week – **Gus, Jeff, Joe, Warren** and **Paul**. Then I thought of some of the folks that have died here recently, **Warren, Steve, Betty, Dawn** and **Mike**.

It **looks like** death is the last word. It **looks like** when we die, that's the end of our story. It **looks like** we're all alone in this world. **Like there is no god**. A lot of people believe that. **But**, then **some of us remember** what Jesus said, "**that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again**." **Some of us remember and we believe it**. And life starts all over again for us. It sounded like an **idle tale** when those brave women told the cowering men two thousand years ago. And the **mighty Roman army** still marched in their streets. And the **high priests and the self-righteous snobs** still ran the temple and synagogues. And most of the people still thought that Jesus was dead and gone. So did the **leaders**. **But Jesus wasn't dead and gone. He's alive. He's here**. He's here for you and for me and for every other person that walks this earth. And Jesus stands with us in the face of sin, death and the power of evil. And in the face of all the lies, betrayals and denials that our world is infected with. **Jesus is alive**.

Jesus knew that his disciples were going to betray, deny and abandon him, **but** he said, "**Come and eat at my table anyway**." The people shouted "crucify, crucify." The soldiers tortured and nailed him to the cross. **But** Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do**." We

don't love and trust God nearly enough. **But** Jesus says, "**I'll love and care for you anyway.**" We don't love and care for our neighbor nearly enough. **But** God says, "**I'll still bless you through them anyway.**" The powerful, selfish, hateful leaders said, "He's dead and gone. We won't have to worry about him anymore." **But** Jesus said, "**I'm back. Even death can't stop me. I'll always be there to confront evil in this world.**"

What's going on in your life this Easter? There may be challenges, dangers, doubts or fears that threaten to overwhelm you. You may have been battling to find and hang onto some **hope** in your life. **But, did you remember Jesus?** **Because Jesus rose, things are different than they might appear.** **God's divine "but!"** **Jesus remembers you.** There's **more to be written in your story.** And despite the trouble that surrounds us, because of the **Divine But**, your life and mine can be very good. I wonder what God has in store for you today, tomorrow, for the rest of your life. There may be trouble, loss and heartache. There may be struggle and hard work. But because of Jesus, you and I can have **faith, hope, love and joy.** More than enough faith, hope, love and joy for every day. They **remembered** Jesus' promise and told an **idle tale.** I remember Jesus' promise too, and I believe it. And today, again, **I pass that tale along to you,** and **together we pass it along to our hurting and needy world.** Happy Easter. Christ is risen! Alleluia! Thanks be to God. Amen.