

**Sunday Sermon**  
**April 15, 2018**  
**Luke 24:36b-49**  
**“A Terrible Thing to Waste”**

### Introduction

Dr. Fred Craddock tells the story of a church with a tradition like this and many churches of decorating with lilies for Easter Sunday. That particular church put lilies everywhere—across the front, down the aisles, in the windows, across the back. Literally everywhere you looked on Easter morning, you could see lilies in the church.

And each year, like here, individuals were given the opportunity to have one of the lilies placed in honor or memory of a loved one for a contribution. And you did not even have to take the lilies home with you after the service. The church would take care of them. Everyone just assumed that the flowers were taken to shut-ins and nursing facilities and hospitals.

All went well until one Easter Sunday when a dear, sweet lady went back into the sanctuary after the service. “I have an aunt who is in a nursing home,” she said, “so if you do not mind, I will just pick up my lily and take it to her.”

Before anyone could stop her, she reached down and picked up one of the lilies. And then in a voice loud enough to be heard in the farthest reaches of the church parking lot, she exclaimed with dismay and horror, “Oh, my goodness! It is not real! It is fake!”

People rushed back into the sanctuary and began looking closely at all the lilies, to discover that every last one of them was made of silk!

There was a called meeting the next night. The pastor and the chair of the worship committee faced a firing squad with questions: “How long has this been going on?” “Where have you been hiding hide all these lilies?” And the one question asked repeatedly, “What happens to the money given in contributions?”

The chairperson explained that each year half of the money raised from lily donations was placed in the fund for worship supplies and the other half was given to the annual mission offering.

“After all,” the pastor chimed in, “what usually happens to real lilies after the Easter service? Most people take them home, water them for a few days until the blooms fall off. They may try to plant them, but usually throw them away. We just thought that was a terrible waste, and you would not want to waste Easter, would you?”

I do not condone misleading people, but the pastor had a point. It is a terrible thing to waste Easter. And yet...

## I

Today on the church calendar is the third Sunday of Easter. It has been two weeks since our sanctuary was filled with fragrant lilies and spring blossoms. And I assure you, they were real. We had exuberant music, excitement in the air, smiles on our faces, an extra bounce in our step.

But where are all the people who were here two weeks ago? Do we feel the same energy and enthusiasm? Is Easter real, or is it a fake event that we get out of storage, set up once a year in spring?

The disciples are having difficulty believing the reports that Jesus is alive. Then Jesus comes and stands among them, our text says. Still they are not sure if he is real or a ghost. But notice the progression. He gives them a word of peace, then proof, and moves them first from alarm and fright, to joy mixed with disbelief and puzzlement, and then to open and understanding hearts and minds.

And this group of disheartened, frightened individuals is resurrected to go forth and witness to the life-giving love of Jesus.

## II

Our Jewish friends have a special time set aside for the 49 days between their holy days of Passover and Shavuot. It is a time of great anticipation. They count each one of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before Shavuot, 49 days, 7 full weeks.

They do this to remember the important connection between these two events. Passover celebrates their being freed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt through the Exodus. Shavuot celebrates their being freed spiritually from the bondage of idolatry and immorality, through their receiving the Torah, the law.

We Christians spend the 40 days and 6 Sundays of Lent getting ready for Easter, to celebrate our freedom from the bondage of sin and mortality through the cross and resurrection. Yet very few of us spend the next 49 days, the 7 weeks after Easter, preparing for Pentecost with the gift of the Spirit and the birth of the church.

How might we prepare for Pentecost? We can start by allowing God to come into our disbelief and fear and allowing God to bring joy and understanding to our hearts and minds.

After his resurrection, Jesus kept coming back to the disciples. That is why we have these appearance texts in worship on Sundays following Easter. To show the risen Lord returning to them and us, to prepare them and us for the coming of Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

## III

But we get distracted with the trials of this world. I was serving as a hospital chaplain, when one day I was paged to see an elderly man. The nurse said he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. His prognosis was not good, and he had asked

to see a chaplain.

I made my way to the room, planning in my mind how we would talk about mortality and dying, looking backward at the man's life and forward to the promise of eternity.

"I am so glad you are here," the man said when I walked into the room. "I did not know who else I could call to help me." "I am glad I can help," I said. "Good," he said, handing me a card. "Could you call this number? It is my accountant. He does not know where I am, April fifteen is this week, and I have not filed my taxes."

I thought, really? You are dying, and you are worried about paying your taxes?

I once heard an accountant say that the way Easter is celebrated is directly related to whether Easter comes before or after April 15. If Easter comes before April 15, he said, the celebration is not as festive. There is a cloud hanging over the service. But if Easter is later and April 15 has already come, the celebration is more joyous. Because, he says, the two guaranteed tests of life, taxes and death, are met and defeated.

The first test, taxes, I hope you have met for this year or will by midnight on Tuesday. If not, you may want to leave here and do a quick search: "How to File an Extension for Your Taxes."

But the second test, death, is over, done. Payment made, test completed, death defeated. That is why we were here two Sundays ago; that is why we keep coming back. Because a risen, living Lord keeps coming back to us, with the message, "Peace be with you."

## Conclusion

How is peace in this world possible with taxes and death ever before us? Because we are both Easter and Pentecost people. The living Lord is with us as we claim resurrection hope and as we celebrate the gift of Holy Spirit and the birth of Christ's church.

Yes, it would be a terrible thing to waste Easter, to let its message and meaning fade from our lives like dying blossoms.

Instead, may we allow Easter to be real for us, and not just for one Sunday. May we receive the peace that Jesus brings, the kind of peace that comes with living in the presence of a living Lord.