

¹On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” ⁸Then they remembered his words.

⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Jesus’ followers really didn’t fare well that first Easter, did they? It was early Sunday morning. The stone had been rolled away, tomb empty, Jesus alive! But the women were heading with spices looking for a dead body to finish burying. They get there, and see the stone rolled away, walk into the empty tomb – then they remembered Jesus’ promise and believed he had risen, right? No, Luke says they stood there **wondering about** what might have happened. It takes two angels to set the record straight: **“He is not here; he is risen. Remember how he told you...?”**

But the rest of the disciples didn’t fare well, either. They didn’t even go out to the tomb. And when the women come to them with the news, what does Luke say? **They didn’t believe them, because their words seemed like nonsense.** Peter gets up to investigate, and when he finds the empty tomb? He leaves **wondering to himself what had happened.**

It’s interesting, isn’t it? It’s Easter morning, Jesus is alive – just like he promised! – and the believers are all having a hard time believing it. They had no trouble believing the bad news – Jesus was dead. It was the *good* news they struggled with.

Can you relate? Maybe like them, this is your first Easter. You’re hearing for the first time Jesus who died for your sins truly, bodily rose. And you’re **wondering** if something like that could actually happen. Or maybe not. Maybe this is your 50th Easter, and you’re saying “He is Risen Indeed” with all the conviction the Holy Spirit can give.

Even so, don’t you find yourself still struggling to believe the good news? Jesus lives – and that means your guilt is gone. But don’t you still sometimes wrestle with it? Your failures as a parent? The sins of your youth? Jesus lives, and that means death is defeated. But can you look me in the eye and tell me that the thought of you taking your last breath doesn’t scare you at all? Jesus lives and reigns over all things, but don’t you still find yourself worrying? About your family or your finances or your health?

Yeah, it’s not just Jesus’ first followers who struggle to believe the Easter good news. It’s all of Jesus’ followers. But here’s the thing: Their slowness to believe couldn’t put Jesus back in his grave. Our slowness to believe can’t put Jesus back in his grave. Nothing can change this fact, this glorious truth the angels announced: **He is not here; he has risen!**

You might still struggle with feelings of guilt. That can't change the fact that it's gone, paid for. Our guilt is why Jesus' death was a must: **The Son of man must be crucified**, the angels said. Someone had to pay what we owed. But Jesus paid it in full. He said so before he died: "It is finished." Because he did, his resurrection was a **must**, too! The empty tomb assures you, "It is finished indeed."

You might still be scared of death. But that can't change the fact that Jesus lives. He broke death's hold on you once and for all. Because he lives, you too will live – and your fear won't stop Jesus from keeping that promise: bringing you to heaven and raising you from death.

You might still struggle with worry. But that can't change the fact that the Jesus lives forever at God's right hand, and that whatever you worry about is under his power and in his perfect care.

Our doubts can't change Easter facts. The tomb is still empty. Jesus is still risen. And that means that even our doubts are forgiven and paid for.

Our doubts can't change Easter facts. Easter facts change our doubts. The story doesn't end here. Jesus came to these disciples struggling to believe - again and again and again he came with the facts until their doubt turned to trust, and their wondering to wonder and awe. Does that maybe teach us what we need, too? We need to spend more time with Jesus. Hear it again and again: He lives!

If it's your first Easter, and you're wondering whether it could really be true, keep coming. See next Sunday how there was a guy just like you named Thomas who put his fingers in the holes in Jesus' hands and side and could doubt no more. If it's your 50th, keep coming. There's a whole season of Easter ahead of us – seven Sundays with the risen Savior. Keep coming, and find less guilt, more peace; less worry, more confidence. The kids made a gift that will help you remember between Sundays – some Easter flowers. Take them home, put on your kitchen table as a reminder. So you live more fully in light of this truth: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Amen.