

Easter Sunday
“This Church Is Alive, Too!”
Matthew 28:1-10

Pastor Puls, Senior Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church
April 20, 2014

Have you heard the sad story about Cuddles the duck? A woman brought her very limp pet duck to the animal hospital. As she laid Cuddles on the table, the vet pulled out his stethoscope and listened to the bird's chest. After a moment or two, the vet shook his head sadly and said, “I'm so sorry, ma'am, Cuddles has passed away.” The distressed owner wailed, “Are you sure?” “Yes, I am sure. Cuddles is dead”, he replied. “How can you be so sure?” she protested. “I mean, you haven't done any testing on him or anything! He might just be in a coma or something.”

The vet thought for a moment, then left the room, and returned a few moments later with a golden Labrador Retriever. The dog stood on his hind legs, put his front paws on the table and sniffed the duck from top to bottom. He then looked at the vet with sad eyes and shook his head. The vet patted the dog and took it out, and returned a few moments later with a cat. The cat jumped up on the table and also sniffed delicately at the bird from head to foot. The cat looked up, shook its head, meowed softly, and strolled out of the room.

The vet looked at the woman and said, “I'm sorry, but as I said, this is most definitely, 100% certifiably, a dead duck.” Then the vet handed the woman a bill for \$5,000. “\$5,000!” she cried, “\$5,000 just to tell me my duck is dead!!” The vet shrugged. “I'm sorry. If you'd taken my word for it, the bill would have been \$50, but with the Lab Report and the Cat Scan, it's now \$5,000.”

On Easter morning, there was no Lab Report or Cat Scan needed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were absolutely certain that their beloved friend Jesus was dead. They had watched him die on the cross on Friday. They had seen his body being buried in the tomb. There was no doubt whatsoever that Jesus had died.

So when they trudged sadly to see the tomb on Sunday morning, they were stunned to see an angel sitting on the stone that had been rolled away from the tomb. They were shocked to hear the angel's news: "Jesus is not here! He is risen!" But when they started to leave to go tell his disciples the news, the two women ran into Jesus himself -- not a "dead duck" Jesus; not some half-dead, half-alive zombie Jesus; but the living, breathing, fully-resurrected, absolutely-alive Jesus! The two Mary's ran up to Jesus, fell down on their knees, grabbed his feet, and worshipped him. Jesus was alive! It was the best possible news! The most miraculous turn of events! It was a day to celebrate!

This is a day for us to celebrate, too. Easter is not just a spring holiday, and an excuse to eat chocolate bunnies and marshmallow peeps. Easter brings real hope to our hearts, and great joy to our souls – because the victory Christ won over sin and death is a victory that God shares with you and me. Our lives here on earth have plenty of sorrow and sadness. But this is a day to celebrate, for our Savior has triumphed over the grave, triumphed over sin and Satan – and, through faith in Jesus, we know that we, too, will triumph in the end, and live with him forever in heaven!

On that first Easter morning, the two Mary's celebrated, because their Lord was alive. But they quickly learned that Jesus wanted his Church to be alive, too – really alive. Notice how Jesus immediately turned Easter into a call to action for his followers.

"Greetings!" he said, "Don't be afraid." Then Jesus right away got down to business. He gave the two Mary's a job to do. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." See, Jesus wanted to get his disciples moving. He didn't want them to be sitting around, or scared, or sleeping. He needed his followers to spring into action. Jesus knew that his time remaining on earth was going to be very short. Soon he'd be ascending to heaven; but he would be leaving a Church behind. And the living Christ wanted his Church to be alive, too -- to be active, to be energetic and passionate, to be a Church in motion!

What a powerful message for this church, for our congregation today! Yes, this is a day for us to celebrate the Lord's Easter victory; but it's also a day to make sure that this church is alive, as Jesus is alive! This is a day for us as a church to refocus on our mission, to recommit ourselves to doing the Lord's work! This is a day for us, as modern-day followers and disciples of Jesus, to get moving, to spring into action! Jesus doesn't need a bunch of sleepy, scared, sitting-around Christians here in Wake Forest! The living Christ wants this church of ours, Hope Lutheran, to be active, to be energetic and passionate, to be a church in motion!

And, look, I know you folks are busy; and I know you've got lots of other priorities and concerns on your plate. Many of you are raising families, and I know what that's like. Many of you are working crazy hours, just trying to make ends meet, and I understand how hard that is. Some of you are retired, just doing the things you feel like doing; and I hope to get there someday, too.

But this is God's work we're doing here at Hope! This is Christ's ministry we're engaged in together! It's our Savior's call to action we are hearing this morning. And the things we're doing to reach kids and reach our neighbors for Jesus

are changing their lives for eternity. I pray, on this Easter Sunday, that you will all feel, and all experience, the importance of that.

So do what you can do. Give what you can give. Share whatever time you're able to. Volunteer whatever service you can share.

This church has so many opportunities to impact the community, to make a difference in people's lives, to help grow the kingdom of God here. People need the Lord; and the living Christ wants his church to be alive in bringing his love and grace to others.

And I'm thankful, friends, that we're doing that. I am so glad to be part of this busy, active ministry with you here at Hope; and I pray that you are, too. The people of Hope Lutheran Church are proclaiming and living the Word and love of Christ every day! Today we celebrate our living Savior, and our living church, as we carry on his work. I want to invite, and to challenge, all of you to be a part of that great work.

I thought about ending my sermon today by bringing in a dog and a cat to do a Lab Report and a Cat Scan. But that's not necessary, is it? For our Lord Jesus is alive, and this church is alive, too! This is, truly, a day to celebrate! Amen.