

**Signs of Life**  
**Luke 24 1-12**  
**3/27/2016 - Easter**

For as long as humans have been looking at the stars, we've wondered if there's life on distant planets. In our imagination, we picture distant worlds where aliens exist -- aliens who either look very much like us, or who look very different from us. These are creatures whom we might one day want to get to know, or, if a lot of science fiction is correct, we may want to run screaming from them.

NASA, of course, is always on the case. With new technology like the Kepler Space Telescope, astronomers have been looking deeper into space for more signs of potentially habitable, perhaps life-sustaining, planets that look more like our own.

Recently, they found one such cousin to Earth approximately 500 light years away. Given that light travels 5.88 trillion miles in one year, well, you do the math. It's a long way!

NASA has named the planet Kepler-186f, and its discovery "is a significant step toward finding worlds like our planet Earth," says Paul Hertz, director of the space agency's Astrophysics Division. Kepler 186-f is in what scientists call the "habitable zone" in relation to its closest star, or about the right distance to sustain life as we know it without burning it up or freezing it out. Kepler 186-f orbits its star every 130 days and receives one-third the energy that we get from our sun, meaning that when the sun is at high noon there is only about as bright as it is here about an hour before sunset. In other words, you could probably leave the sunscreen behind.

Like with most of these discoveries, however, the scientists don't yet know if Kepler 186-f harbors any life, or if it could sustain life as we know it, since they haven't learned much about its atmosphere. Although the planet is about the size of Earth, its mass and composition aren't known, either. Previous research leads experts to believe that the surface is rocky, just like every other planetary body we know about except Earth, whose surface area is 71 percent water -- the basic building block of life. The chances for life

to grow on places like Kepler 186-f are very slim, but we keep looking for life among the dead stones and craters of those distant worlds.

### **The women at the tomb were not looking for signs of life.**

The women who came to the tomb early on Easter Sunday morning were moving among the rocks but had no such illusions that they would find any life there. Unlike scientists who are always hoping for new discoveries, these women weren't expecting to find anything new. They had seen death before, had returned to the tombs many times, and always found the same thing. It was not a "habitable zone," since those who were laid among those rocks were always dead -- cold and lifeless.

### **The women came to take care of the body of a dead man**

That's why they came with spices that morning. You didn't bring those along unless you were expecting to find death amid the stones. Jewish burial rites at the time meant anointing the dead body with spices to hasten decomposition and cut down the smell. Then, a year later, they came back among the rocks and gathered the remaining bones. They put them in a stone box called an ossuary, and then put the box in a niche in the back of the tomb. The same tomb would be used in the same way many times, and the rocks would remain silent.

That morning they came to anoint the body of the one whom they had hoped would bring new life to a world desperately looking for it. When Jesus of Nazareth had been with them, they felt like anything was possible. They had seen people healed from disease, had seen demons cast out with a word, and had even seen the dead brought back to life. They had heard him talk about the kingdom of God, which sounded to them like a whole new world, sustaining a different kind of life than the one they were used to -- a world where the first become last and the last first; a world where violence and pain are no more; a world where the brokenness and sins of the past are forgiven; and where everything is made new. But this was not some distant world; in fact, Jesus said that this seemingly alien world was already here and breaking in among them in his own life and ministry.

That life, however, had been cut short. Jesus had been nailed to a Roman cross as a criminal, a revolutionary who had threatened the world as

those in power knew it. He had talked as if he was from somewhere else, not from this world. His authority and wisdom seemed to be otherworldly. At the same time, however, he was fully human --fully like them, like us. These women, like so many others, had their view of the world changed by this one who at once seemed so alien, and yet, so familiar.

### **They discovered however a sign of life: an empty tomb!**

But now Jesus was dead, and the familiar burial work of the old world needed to be done. They were certain they'd not find signs of life among the stones, rocks and tombs. When they arrived, spices in hand, however, they found that the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away. The lifeless body they expected to find inside was likewise gone (vv. 2-3). What they did find, however, were "two men in dazzling white clothes" standing beside them, a sight so alien that the women bowed their terrified faces to the ground. The men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (v. 5). They had expected to find the same old thing -- the dead among the dead, the stones undisturbed and yielding nothing but cold, dry, dead, reality. What they discovered, instead, was life: the promise of the real, abundant, eternal life the world has always been looking for.

- Why do you seek the living among the dead?
- Why are you looking for signs of life in a graveyard?

### **The empty tomb changes the direction of our lives**

The empty tomb, however, sends us in a new direction. The empty tomb is, itself, a sign of life. That it once harbored death but now is empty is the telltale clue! New life has been here! Something new has broken into our world. When Jesus rose from the dead, it signaled the beginning of a new creation, a new world. It signaled the ultimate defeat of death itself and, with it, the sin that caused it in the first place. The kingdom of God is not a distant world but the reality of what happens when heaven and earth come together, renewing both -- the reality we pray for in the Lord's Prayer -- "on earth as it is in heaven".

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that Jesus' resurrection was the "first fruits" (we might say "model") of what will happen to us in God's future -- renewed people in a renewed heaven and earth where God dwells with us and makes us whole (v. 20). We don't have to look for life "out there" because it's coming here and, indeed, is here and available for us right now. The One who was dead is now alive, and, because he lives, we, too, can live without peering hopefully into the darkness of the universe. We have the light of life that illumines everything and makes all things new!

Because of this, those who follow the living Christ are always seeing life where others see death. The world is not a cold, lifeless, rocky place, but a world with a hope and future. We live and work in the present with that future in mind. Thus, Paul says to the Corinthians, "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). God turned over a rock and revealed life. That's the best news this planet has ever received!

NASA is still searching for life on worlds that are so far away that it would take us 500 years to get there if we traveled at light speed. God has brought a new world to our doorstep in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead! He lives, Alleluia. Alleluia, Amen.

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In this Easter scripture the women go to the tomb, only to find it empty. Angels appear and remind the women of Christ's own words that he will rise again. When the women go and tell the other disciples, the others are confused.

**Luke 24:1-12**  
**Common English Bible**

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of these holy Words.