

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 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, been 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.

That's why they came with spices that morning. You didn't bring spices 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, about a year later, you would go back among the rocky tombs, gather the remaining bones, put them in a stone box called an ossuary, and put the box in a niche carved at 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 the women came to anoint the body of the One whom they had hoped would bring new life to a world desperately looking for new life. With Jesus of Nazareth among them, they felt as if 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 Jesus 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; a world where everything is made new. But Jesus said this was not some

distant world; he said that this seemingly alien world was already here and breaking in among them through his own life and ministry.

Not that life had been cut short. The Romans nailed Jesus to a cross as a criminal, a dangerous revolutionary who had threatened the world's powers. Jesus always 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, fully like us. These women, like so many others, had their world view changed by this one who at once seemed so alien, and yet, so familiar.

But now he was dead, and the familiar burial work of the old world needed to be done. They were certain they would not find signs of life among the stones, the rocks and the 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 gone (vv. 2-3). What they found instead 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). The women expected to find the same old thing: the dead among the dead, the stones undisturbed and yielding nothing but cold, dry, geophysical reality. What they discovered, instead, was life: the promise of the real, abundant, eternal life the world had been seeking.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why are you looking for signs of life in a graveyard? Unbelievably, the empty tomb 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 starts here! Something new is breaking 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. It's the reality we pray for in the Lord's Prayer.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that Jesus' resurrection was the "first fruits" (we might say "prototype") of what will happen to us in God's future: a 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, it 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 a 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 Cor. 15:58). God turned over a rock and revealed life. That's the best news this planet has ever received!

NASA may still be 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! Christ is risen! Shout Hosanna! Amen.

Prayer: Living God, We thank you that Easter is not about a people, but about all people, that your love and your Salvation are for all who confess with voices, hearts and lives that the tomb is empty because Jesus is risen, that we might know forgiveness, that lives might be reborn and your name glorified now and for eternity. Amen.

Source:

- "NASA's Kepler discovers first earth-size planet in the 'habitable zone' of another star." July 23, 2015. nasa.gov. Retrieved October 3, 2015.

Signs of Life

Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Luke 24:1-12

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 much unlike us. These are creatures whom we might one day get to know, or, if a lot of science fiction is correct, from whom we may get to run screaming.

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. Despite its uninspiring name, the discovery of Kepler-186f "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 frying it or freezing it. Kepler 186-f orbits its star every 130 days and receives one-third the energy that we get from our sun, meaning that the sun at high noon there is only about as bright as it is here about an hour before sunset.

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.