

## Sermon for Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025

The Easter account in the Gospel of John begins with a lot of running. When Mary Magdalene finds the tomb empty, she runs to tell Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Her words—like the shot of the gun that begins the race—send the disciples running to check it out for themselves.

I guess you had to be there to feel such—what? Confusion, fear, disbelief?

I don't think any of *us* rushed here this morning, breathless, to proclaim Jesus risen from the tomb. In fact, I stopped at Starbucks for a latte on the way to church. No confusion, no fear, no sense of disbelief for me. I stopped at Starbucks! What should be a mind-blowing event for us has become rather ho-hum. We've heard the story *so* many times that we miss the sheer potency of it.

Swiss theologian Karl Barth said that what brings people to worship—not just on Easter, but on any day—is an unspoken question clinging to their hearts and minds, and that question is simply this: “Is it true? Is it true there is a God? Is it true that God lives and gives us life? Is it true that something so *extraordinary* happened on that morning that we can only rebuild our lives on its foundations? Is it true?”

I believe it's true.

And I don't think you would be here today if you didn't believe it was true.

One of my favourite children's book is a charming little book by theologian Laura Alary called “Is That Story True?” It makes the point that stories, including biblical stories, can be true whether they happened or not. She breaks the mindset that a story must be assessed as either true or false—a message all of us need to hear from an early age.

And that's what Laura Alary does with her daughter, Maggie, as they read bedtime stories together. As Maggie listens to the different stories, she finds that some are true because they really happened. Others are true because they tell us about a real person, place, or event. And some stories are true—even if they are completely made up—because they tell us something true about our own experiences.

Yes, there's something in the Easter story to doubt. Even the disciples doubted at first.

As post-modern people, who like to think of ourselves as sophisticated; we sometimes forget that the idea God could raise someone from the dead would be as difficult for these ancient people to believe as it is for us. They had seen many people die and never once had they seen anyone come to life again.

Yes, there is something in the story to *doubt*. But there is also something in the story that reaches the deepest regions of our hearts and minds, where both doubt and faith are found.

In the resurrection story, God gives us *such* a miracle of love and forgiveness that it is worthy of faith—and thus open to doubt. The very doubts we may hold attest to the scale and power of what we proclaim.

So the place to begin in the life of faith is not necessarily with those things we never doubt. Realities about which we hold *no* doubt may *not* be large enough to reveal God to us. What we proclaim at Easter is *too mighty* to be encompassed by certainty, too wonderful to be found only within the borders of our imaginations.

The truth is I don't think it matters whether or not we believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. What matters is that we believe in the *meaning* of the resurrection—God's promise of new life. What matters is how we *live* as a result of the revelation of God on Easter morning.

Let's face it: the resurrection will always remain a mystery to us because we weren't there to witness it.

However, the *meaning* of the resurrection is not a mystery. The meaning of the risen Christ means life instead of death; hope instead of despair; and God's promise of cosmic transformation—a promise to make all things new!

Because of Easter we can be certain of a future in which God's kingdom on earth will become a *reality* one day, a kingdom where there is peace and justice for all. In the Isaiah reading this morning, we heard God promise...“I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... where the wolf and the lamb shall feed together... they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.” What an amazing promise!

Easter is *full* of promise. And we can trust that God keeps God's promise.

You see, Easter is a verb—active, in motion; and we must keep looking around, in our own lives, in the world, trying to figure out where Easter is breaking out.

Sadly the world is still a place where violence can take our breath away, and if we're not careful, even our hope. I don't know about you, but sometimes I dread listening to the evening news because inevitably, it's bad news.

At times like these it's very important to watch for signs that Jesus is risen.

The signs are all around us. We just need to look!

I know Jesus is risen because I saw him this week in the downtown east side feeding the hungry.

I saw him visiting someone in hospital with tender words of comfort and care.

I saw him at a climate justice conference, speaking passionately for changes that require sacrifice and commitment on our part to heal the planet.

I saw him weeping with someone who made a stupid decision and ended up in jail.

I saw him here at St. Andrew's on Thursday listening patiently and attentively to a person in distress.

Yes, Jesus Christ is risen!

When you go back to your everyday lives, to your joys and sorrows and work and play—you will see him in every impulse to love and heal.

When you go out into your place of devastation and loss—you will see him in every hand that reaches out to help and hold you.

When you go out into your places of fear—you will find him in the small but growing sense that you are not alone, that you are never alone.

When you go out into your places of amazement, noticing the gorgeous cherry blossoms in full bloom; looking at photographs of your friend's precious newborn baby girl and experiencing the miracle of birth; or gazing at the enormous pale lemon moon as it rises—you will feel him in a universe that still knows how to be beautiful, that can still astonish you with birdsong and morning light.

You will see the risen Christ every time an ordinary experience is transformed into a sacred one.

You will see the risen Christ every time someone forgives you or when you find it in your heart to forgive.

Do you have any *doubt* that Easter happens every single moment?

Because we are an Easter people, we are called to make a choice for tomorrow against the evidence of yesterday.

We are called to give ourselves to the future while living fully in the present.

We are called to look differently at the world.

We are called to follow Jesus, the risen Christ, into the longing heart of God's desire. And God's desire is that we live as if God's kingdom has come—as if there already is a new heaven and new earth.

And like Mary, we are called to tell people that we “have seen the Lord” because we are an Easter people.

Thanks be to God! Amen.