

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong

Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Let us pray: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

And the Angel said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Today, as we gather here at our annual Easter celebration. We admire the beautiful lilies and flowers that surround us. The children joyously sang an Easter song, and soon look forward to an Easter egg hunt. We even have an Easter cake that awaits us after the service to celebrate the event of Jesus' resurrection. We are here to memorialize an event that happened around 2,000 years ago. A historically documented person named Jesus from Galilee walked this earth proclaiming to be the Son of God, sent from God to redeem the world with the message of the forgiveness of sin. He claimed to be God's Messiah, foretold by the forefathers of Israel to bring us into a new relationship with God and with each other. The person named Jesus was innocently executed, died, was buried then miraculously

overcame all human possibilities by resurrecting from the dead after three days. His death meant we may overcome death ourselves and one day enjoy paradise with God in heaven.

This is our Christian theology in a nutshell. But to many in our modern world, this declaration of faith sounds senseless, unscientific, and to many unbelievable. So, can the Easter message be true?

When Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them ran to tell the apostles that Jesus' body was no longer there, today's Gospel says, "But these words seemed to the apostles as an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Even the disciples had their doubts.

Fear and doubt are not often the themes for an Easter sermon. It's usually about hope and a new beginning. But before those things can happen, fear and doubt are normal and need to be processed. Where we are in the Gospel today, Jesus hasn't appeared to them yet, so it was normal for them to be in doubt and fear. They had good reason to doubt, they were fearful for their own lives. Scripture says they locked themselves in their own homes for fear of their own imprisonment.

In Mark's Gospel account, his story was even more short, straightforward and simple: There were mourners, an empty tomb, an otherworldly ghostly figure, and

a directive to tell everybody what happened that the frightened women promptly disobeyed.

This is the part of the Easter story that needs to be told. It's normal to doubt before the Alleluias! Being afraid is a much more normal reaction than shouting alleluia. Empty tombs and discarded burial cloths, and the intensely rich aroma of the spices that swirled around the tomb all added to the drama. Spiritual visitations and conversations with the dead — these should make us also tremble with wonder and fear. What do you say when you've seen such things? Nothing makes perfect sense. Is this where you personally are in your Easter story? With doubts and fear of whether Jesus is real or not? If you are, it's OK.

Today, it's ok to imagine and wonder and even question the truth about Easter. But none of the different writers of the Gospel let terror lead to denial. And fear doesn't mean the women remained frightened forever. Instead, their account holds out an invitation to us. The angel tells the women to go to Galilee — go back to the place where it all started — and “there you will see him.”

This Easter, we are invited to go back to the place where it all began. In your own life, where do you need to go back to in order to find the Risen Savior? For Christians who have been a follower of Christ for a long time, do we need to go back to our Baptismal Vows and be reminded about God's love for us? For new

followers of Christ, do we need to revisit our reaffirmation of faith and remember why we chose to follow Jesus? And for those who are here who are interested in seeking who this risen savior is, Christ is asking you to come and follow him to begin a new journey with him? And you will find him there.

For all of us, we are in the right place to journey with Christ. In the Episcopal Church, we are encouraged to “question and doubt,” because everyone's Easter journey is precious, valid, different and honorable. And each one's journey is welcomed here. This is a safe church to question what **had been** taught to us that may not make sense anymore. It is a safe space to find your truth with God.

Maybe sometime during your life something steered you away from a community of faith. Maybe you thought you wouldn't be welcomed here because of what you have done or who you are. But the Easter event invites us to go back to where we came from, and we will find Jesus there. Jesus promises that we will see him as we follow him. But, don't delay, just as the disciples responded quickly we must too. Don't wait till we've sorted things out in our lives, or wait till the children are all grown up, or wait until we retire to discover or serve Jesus.

It's ok to doubt before our Alleluias! But don't let terror turn into denial. For the Easter story is just the beginning to a beautiful transformative life that is ahead of you. As we see in history, Easter leads us into the Season of Pentecost, where all

the nations of the world become transformed by hearing the gospel, and this is where the church begins.

The Gospel today continues to say “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.” Let us follow the example of Peter, who investigated for himself the reality of the empty tomb so that we too become amazed and transformed.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen. Happy Easter everyone. Amen.