

**Easter Day C  
Luke 24:1-13  
April 4, 2010**

**There was an ad in the newspaper yesterday that quite frankly puzzled the heck out of me. It was from one of our local churches encouraging people to attend its Easter services, but it was written to read like an obituary.**

**It said, “Jesus of Nazareth died Friday afternoon as a result of multiple wounds to the head, hands, feet and side during crucifixion in Jerusalem, Israel. Services will be held at various churches Saturday evening and Sunday morning throughout the world to commemorate his life and death.”**

**I’m sorry, but I am not here this morning to commemorate Jesus’ life and death, and I hope that you are not here for that reason, either. Commemorating someone’s life and death is something you do for a good person, a memorable person, for sure. For example, you may be aware that today is April 4, that 42 years ago today, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot as he stood on his hotel balcony in Memphis. And every year, there is a federal holiday and a weekend full of all kinds of civic events where we commemorate Dr. King’s life and death and honor his legacy.**

**That is *not* what we are here to do today. We are not commemorating a day 2,000 years ago, when a few confused women showed up at a tomb to anoint their friend’s body, only to discover it was gone. We are not here to remember the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.**

**We are here to proclaim a living Christ.**

**Jesus Christ is risen TODAY. That is what we sing with great power and enthusiasm on this Easter morning. Not that Jesus’ body went missing on a Sunday morning two millennia ago. Christ IS risen, we proclaim. Not that his friends and followers experienced him after his death as somehow being present to them in some new way.**

**No. Christ is alive. That is why we are gathered here today. That is the good news our joyful celebration proclaims. We are not here because a good man lived, taught, challenged the authorities and was killed as an enemy of the state. We are not here because his friends somehow rallied from the shock of his death and started a new religious cult in his memory. We are not here because the earth has amazed and astounded us with an explosive burst of spring flowers, surging shoots and bursting leaves after a long, cold winter. We are not even here to celebrate that (insert possible Spartan joke here, otherwise ...) that when all this is over, we get to go out for a really great brunch.**

**We are here for another purpose. We are here to shout “The Lord is risen indeed!” with full-throated gusto and alleluias to boot. We are here to proclaim the power of the resurrection and the ongoing, daily presence of a living Jesus in our lives.**

**To do anything else would be to stand there like Peter, staring at some strips of linen cloth amazed, but uncomprehending. To do anything else would be to join with those incredulous apostles, who heard the women’s story then promptly dismissed it as crazy talk.**

**It is possible, you know, to get stuck there ... stuck at this story of an empty tomb, a missing body, an abandoned shroud, an outrageous proclamation by a couple of shiny guys who report that Christ is not here, he is risen, then poof, they’re gone. It is possible to get so hung up on the few details that we have been given, that we forget to move on to the bigger picture.**

**“How can this be?” we wonder, just like Peter and the other men. Dead people don’t just stand up and walk away. There must be some other explanation. Someone stole the body. Animals got into the tomb and dragged it off. There must be some way for this all to make sense. There must be some logic, some rationale, some science that would put all of this into a nice, tidy frame.**

**And we stand and stare and stare and stare at that empty tomb, wondering what it might mean.**

**There is a Zen saying, “the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon.” And if we get stuck there at the door of the empty tomb, if we keep seeking the living among the dead, then we are putting all our energies into looking at the finger, and not at the moon. Walter Brueggemann, the great Biblical scholar, says that “the question of Easter is not whether you can get your mind around the resurrection because you cannot.”**

**The question is -- can you permit Easter to dawn on your own horizon? Can you allow for the possibility of a new creation – in your life and in this world? Can you open the door to a living Christ ... not a good man who died a long time ago, not an intellectual or spiritual concept that can show you how to live a better life, but a person, a living person, who will walk with you, talk with you, hold you up and then break open every preconception you ever had about how the world works and what your life might mean.**

**Because when you stop staring at the empty tomb, and you look up to greet the risen Christ, things start to happen -- amazing things. People who know the risen Christ know that the journey is not finished, the possibilities are endless, and that God is writing a new chapter, a happier ending, to their story.**

**They are like the people we saw in Haiti who continue to sing and clap and praise God, even in the midst of poverty and earthquakes and hurricanes. Who stand up, instead of breaking down. Who walk on, instead of stopping in their tracks. Who shout out “Mesi, Jezi” – “Thank you, Jesus.” Thank you for another day, for breath in the lungs, for sun on the shoulders, for life, for another chance, for the promise of better times.**

**Christ is alive. Alive in their hope. Alive in their praise. Alive in their rebuilding.**

**People who know the risen Christ also know that earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. That forgiveness and reconciliation are not only possible, but probable -- status quo in the Kingdom of God. It's like a man calling his sister one day, after not speaking for six years. There was something stupid they argued over, some thing they both wanted when they divided their parents' estate. And words were spoken; then no words were spoken. And the anger festers and burns until the day he dials the phone. "I'm so sorry," he says. "I was wrong." "You hurt me," she says. "But I forgive you." The breach is crossed. The future is possible again.**

**Christ is alive. Alive in their honesty. Alive in their hearts laid open. Alive in the forgiveness that seals the wounds.**

**People who know the risen Christ also know that death and darkness and despair are real, but they refuse to let any of those things control them or have dominion over them.**

**They are like a family I met here in Lansing this winter. Their 5-year-old son was being treated at Sparrow for an advanced case of neuroblastoma, a deadly cancer. Their paths and mine crossed for a few weeks, before they went on to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, where little Everest was operated on last Wednesday, and almost 100 percent of his tumor was removed. Was there some incredible synergy that this should happen during Holy Week, on the way to Good Friday, people wondered. Was Everest bearing a cross of his own?**

**His mother didn't see it that way. She looked at their struggle through Easter eyes. After the surgery, she wrote, "What I see is how much this journey really isn't about what we do. This is not a test. This is something very difficult that has happened to us, and now we are held in many ways. Do my thanks CLIMB to the stars that so many people hold Everest in prayer each night. YES! Do I find peace in a personal sense that God is with us. YES. However, what I realize most is it's not about numbers or the doing or expectations. It comes back to the grace of Christ. Looking at Easter...it's the grace of a loving God that I will celebrate. Maybe the difference is I have just needed to keep celebrating regardless of what church season it has been."**

**Christ is alive. Alive in their confidence. Alive in their community of friends and family who pray and care and worry and tend to their needs. Alive in their celebration, in their defiant proclamation of life in the very face of death.**

**Christ is alive. And we are not here today to commemorate a dead man. We are not here to stand and fixate on the question of the empty tomb. We are here because we understand that God's Easter "Yes" has trumped the world's Good Friday "No." We are here to proclaim that death has no more dominion; that things which had grown old are being made new and that things which were cast down are being raised up.**

**We are here because he lives. He lives, and nothing is the same. He lives, and anything is possible.**

**And so we cry, with all our hearts ... "Alleluia! Christ is risen!"**