

Sermon Easter Vigil Year C 2025; Luke 24:1-12 All Saints

*“In the name of the Creator God, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen”*

### **Christ, Resurrection, and Life**

Alleluia! Look at the light now shining, the light that has overcome the darkness. The Paschal candle, our symbol for the light of Christ, the light that fills the world, the light that fills this church, the light that fills all of us. Light and life have replaced darkness and death. This candle symbolizes the risen Christ leading all of creation, including each of us, into the promised land of new life, a life of hope and of love, and into the awareness of Christ’s presence within us all. This is a time for joy. Let us celebrate! The tomb is empty. It could not smother and extinguish the light and the life and the love of Christ. Of course it could not. Love will never die. In St. Paul’s words “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54–55)

This Easter Vigil that we celebrate tonight is the first celebration of Easter, and it is among the most ancient liturgies we have, dating to at least the second century if not earlier. It has four parts. First was the Service of Light with lighting of the new fire and the paschal candle; then the Service of Lessons in which we heard the history of God’s actions in the world as recorded in the Hebrew Bible; next is the Christian Initiation with renewal of our Baptismal Vows; followed by the Holy Eucharist in which we partake of our Easter communion. There is a lot happening right here this evening, all of it a great celebration.

Think about the gospel we just read. What a surprise it must have been for Mary Magdalene and the other women when in the dim light of the early dawn of that Sunday they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, entered inside it, and saw that Jesus’ body was not there. They were terrified. They bowed their faces to the ground, into the dirt. Then these two strange men in “dazzling clothes” speak to them, and they remember what Jesus had told them, that on the third day he would rise again, and the women—unlike the men whom they

would tell about the empty tomb—believed. (In fact the women all come out looking a lot more loyal, loving, and better disciples than the men in these resurrection stories. Maybe the gospel writers are trying to tell us something?) All of the four gospels have accounts of what happened this morning, of the empty tomb. Each has a different story, different characters including different women who get to the tomb first, different disciples. In Matthew there is an earthquake and an angel who speaks to them. In Mark there is a young man dressed in a white robe. In John the risen Jesus speaks to Mary. And here in Luke two men in dazzling clothes, these two angelic figures, say to the women “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but risen.” Despite these differences, in each gospel the bottom line is that Jesus is not there. The tomb of death could not hold him in. And to say the least they were surprised. And no wonder. Nothing like this had ever happened before. In Jesus’ world nobody thought much about resurrection or life after death. Their scripture the Torah says very little about it, and there were no traditions in ancient Israel to suggest a belief in the resurrection of someone who had just died. Some thought that it would happen at the very end, the “End Time,” when God would raise all his people to share in the new heaven and new earth like the prophets had promised. But there was nothing in there about a dead-and-buried person being transformed or re-embodied during their time on earth, actually happening in their own time here. No one would have imagined that a dead person could be resurrected like that. What would happen is that they would finally see—finally become aware—that the Kingdom of God Jesus had talked about was already here, in fact had always been here and would always be here, just like Jesus had told them. Remember his words earlier in Luke: “In fact, the Kingdom of God is among you”? It had been there all along, but the people just didn’t know it. It was present in a world not yet ready for it. Oh yes, Jesus had talked about it, but weren’t those words about his own dying and rising just some kind

of a metaphor? They would not have taken his words literally. It is no wonder they were surprised. And wouldn't we be too?

Yes, one thing that happened at the resurrection is that Jesus was fully revealed as the eternal and deathless incarnated Christ. Yet, I think these stories about the empty tomb tell us more than just about a bodily resurrection of Jesus. More than that, I think they tell us about the way the world works, about the pattern within all of life, about the reality within all of creation, about the presence of Christ in every created thing. I'm not talking about the Christ as if Christ is Jesus' last name, which many of us have been taught to be the case, but is really not. I'm talking about the Christ within Jesus and within all of life, including each of us. I'm talking about the Christ who has been here since the very beginning of creation, the Christ we see in the prologue to John where "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life." It is in the humanity of Jesus, whose life lasted just a little over thirty years and who lived just over two thousand years ago, that we see the reality that the divine can and indeed does reside within the human. Christ cannot die, nor can Jesus, and neither can any of us, all being created by and in God's image. Going a step further, if death is not possible for the Christ, then it is not possible for anything that shares in the divine nature, and that includes everything that God has made. So we too share in the resurrection. Franciscan Father Richard Rohr says that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the blueprint for all of life, for all created things. We can trust in it because we see it happening everywhere within creation. Look at the birth and death of stars, explosions that provide the elements of life throughout the universe. Look at the elements in water—hydrogen and oxygen—when they change form from water to steam to ice. Matter changes form but it does not die. Look at the bursting forth of new life every spring, emerging from the darkness and death of winter. This change and rebirth is the pattern constantly at work in the universe. Jesus' resurrection is not just about the man Jesus. It is

about all of life. The Eternal Christ, who is present in all of us, never dies, and never dies in us.

Let's look at resurrection from a slightly different perspective. What does it look like in our every day lives? Those times when we realize we must leave behind a part of us, "die" to something within us, so that we can experience the newness of something more, something better? Maybe we have been hurt and have suffered because of someone, and have been carrying that hurt and resentment for a long time, even years. We feel the burden and pain of unforgiveness, the anger that returns when we think of the person who hurt us, until we reach the point when we've carried it long enough. Something happens and we decide to forgive, and our life changes. We can move on to newness of life. We can once again "stand with dignity," which Jim has often said is what resurrection means. Moments such as these are resurrection moments. Resurrection is about more than just what happens when we die. It is also about life as we know it now.

So, what is it about our Easter story that provides hope? Why is it that we can be happy and rejoice today? I don't think it's really about Easter cards, little bunnies, Easter egg hunts for the children, chocolate eggs, the beautiful lilies, or even those wonderful hats that we used to see a lot of on Easter morning, but unfortunately not so much any more. Those are all parts of this festival, this cultural celebration of spring we associate with the day. And that is all fine and good. But, there is more to be happy about than those traditions. I think more importantly, we can know the peace, the comfort, the joy and the hope that resurrection provides. Jesus' resurrection reveals for us the universal pattern of death and rebirth, that nothing dies, that death gives birth to new life, new hope, new possibility. Death is not the end. It is just the gateway into a new life, another door through which we pass along this journey of everlasting life, as the collect says "the narrow door from which an endless river flows into a new body," that eternal life in Christ. And resurrection is not just something that

happens at some later time, in some remote place after we die. Resurrection is also about our earthly lives right now.

Marcus Borg tells about a sermon preached by a Hindu professor in a Christian seminary decades ago. He was talking about Jesus, and this one way Jesus models, the way of Jesus. He said that this way—being born into a new way of being—is known in all of the religions of the world. The way of Jesus is a universal way, known to millions who have never heard of Jesus. No, this way of Jesus is not a set of beliefs about Jesus, as if the only people who can be saved are those who know the word “Jesus.” Rather, this way of Jesus, this way of death and resurrection, is the path of transition and transformation from an old way of being into a new way of being. It is also an invitation to live as Jesus lived, a doorway to a life in which hope is offered to the hopeless, healing to the sick, wholeness to the broken, and dignity restored to those who need to stand again. And it is an all-inclusive truth, not a truth for just Christianity, but for all faiths, all people. It is how reality works, and the Christ is that reality. I’ve said this before at the Easter Vigil, and I will say it again tonight: Christ is alive! Now that’s worth celebrating, that’s worth rejoicing. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Rev. Bob Donnell

Easter Vigil April 20, 2025