

# Full to the Brim: An Expansive Life

Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Just a few days ago, on Good Friday, the sermon began with the questions, "What is the meaning of the cross?" "What is it that got Jesus killed" and "Why did Jesus have to die?" After exploring some opposing answers to those questions, which are still hotly debated in the wider church between the conservative and progressive ends of the theological spectrum, I came to this conclusion:

Regardless of the reason or reasons for Jesus' death, this story of the cross, of his crucifixion, can be interpreted in the following way. We can find rest and peace with the assurance of whatever it is we think it is that separates us from God has been taken care of – fully! And perhaps, we may have never known this, and lived into this reality, without this story of Jesus' death on the cross.

Ultimately, the meaning of the cross, as well as the meaning of the empty tomb, reveals the radical grace of God. On this Easter Sunday, then, I want to ask the next set of questions.

- **What might we have never known and lived into without the story of the Resurrection?**
- **What is the meaning of the empty tomb?**
- **How should the story of Jesus' resurrection be interpreted?**

To be honest, with each passing year I'm more and more tempted to just claim it all as a Divine mystery and sit down. Those of you familiar with College Hill know that we lean to the progressive side of the theological and social spectrum (and some of us lean fairly hard). We realize, therefore, **there is validity in the debate over whether the story of the empty tomb should be taken literally, as in an actual historical in-person bodily resurrection of Jesus, or metaphorically.**

I'm not going to tell you, however, what it is that you should believe. The Church, with a capital C, has done far too much of that over the past 2000 years. For at the heart of a progressive approach to Christianity is a willingness to question tradition, including orthodox understandings of church doctrines and biblical interpretation. It also involves the respect of intellectual integrity, including the use of the latest in biblical and scientific knowledge and understanding. Therefore, I will claim this. **Contrary to the teaching and preaching of many, requiring this story to be interpreted literally is not a determining factor as to whether someone is a Christian or not. But it is important to ask of yourself what it is you believe, and why.**

And it must be noted, there is a profound reality to what can be called the truth of Easter, affirmed by even the most progressive biblical scholars and theologians. Marcus Borg put it this way.

For me, the historical ground of Easter is very simple: **the followers of Jesus, both then and now, continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death...** Thus I see the post-Easter Jesus as an experiential reality. Christians throughout the centuries have continued to experience Jesus as a living spiritual reality, a figure of the present, not simply a memory from the past. The truth of Easter is grounded in these experiences, not in what happened (or didn't happen) on a particular Sunday almost two thousand years ago.

**It is true, without the story of the empty tomb the faith tradition known as Christianity would have never developed. Nor would we have any knowledge of Jesus' teachings, his life and ministry.**

What then, can we say about the meaning of Easter? On a grand scale, we can say it ultimately points to a time of triumph over all the powers of tyranny, oppression, domination, injustice, and death. It promises that the ways of God will prevail over all the attitudes, behaviors, and systems opposed to God and the ways and teachings of Jesus.

Another element attributed to the story of the empty tomb is a powerful message and promise of great hope. I summarize it every time I officiate at a funeral or memorial service. And perhaps it should be stated more often. **Death does not have the final word. There is life beyond this life, whatever that may be like, and it is lived eternally in the loving and Sacred Presence of God.** The promise of Easter, then, makes it possible to experience a sense of comfort and peace even in the midst of our sorrow and grief.

An additional way to interpret the promise of Easter is to focus on the message of **new beginnings, and the hope of transformation in the world here and now.** This applies, for instance, to us as individuals. This is especially comforting when we mess up. Anyone here mess up lately? Just me? This is also comforting when current circumstances in life aren't particularly going our way. To put this in non-theological language, our God is a God of second chances, for **grace, forgiveness, and love lie at the very heart of God, of the Divine.** The good news on this Easter Sunday is that regardless of what kind of new beginning you are facing – wanted or unwanted – God promises to be *with* you and *for* you.

Speaking of new beginnings, these past two years of navigating the disorienting and uncharted territory of living through a **global pandemic** has been difficult and challenging for us not only as individuals and families, but also for us as a community of faith. **Like all religious communities, College Hill has indeed been going through this period of time having to face new beginnings, transition after transition, and perhaps transformation.** Transitions and transformation are not easy for any community of faith. Yet, it is often vitally necessary in order to be the church that God is calling us to be in this specific time and place. Like the ancient psalmist, I too believe that **God is always doing a new thing – a new thing in our personal lives, and a new thing in the Church, in the life and ministry of this congregation.** Therefore, it is crucial that we are intentional and persistent in trying to **discern where and how God is leading us into the future.**

It is in that spirit I'd like for you to be thinking about **what a new beginning or transformation looks like here at College Hill**. It certainly includes getting acquainted, or reacquainted with each other after such a long time of separation. How we long for a time of extended in-person fellowship again.

There's just one more element, among many other possibilities, that I want to share about the importance of the resurrection story, which, by the way, vary quite a bit in detail in each of the four gospels. You've heard it before in Easter sermons here. It's about **practicing resurrection. It's about what we do because of Easter**. The 'Living the Questions' church school curriculum, *Saving Jesus Redux*, talks about "Practicing Resurrection." It states:

The real power of the Resurrection comes when the followers of Jesus become the body of Christ in the world, striving to bring new life to the world, to eradicate injustice, poverty, and violence. In both the society at large and in people's personal lives: the practice of resurrection is about otherwise "dead" people **being inwardly transformed and empowered to transform society**.

**Easter, then, is not just about ourselves and our assurance of the hereafter. It's about taking action here and now, to love fully and be who God created us to be, to be who God created you to be.** To help in this regard, I'll close with a poem by the Rev. Bret Myers entitled, "Easter Encouragement for the Journey".

#### ***Easter Encouragement for the Journey***

**Remember that resurrection is more than mere resuscitation! It is life transformed!**

It is faith in possibilities, when others are convinced of inevitability.  
 It is the courage to love others, when they don't love you in return...  
 to show compassion, when others are heaping judgment...  
 to live by peace, when others are being violent...  
 to work for justice, when others are working for wealth...  
 to respond with gentleness, when others are reacting with rage...  
 and to trust that life, well-lived, even if short-lived, is preferable to longevity without virtue.

**Don't remain caterpillars when you can become butterflies!**

Live beautifully!  
 Birth goodness in all you think, say, and do!  
 For you are called to life abundant!

**Let us be full to the brim with an expansive life.**

God's blessings be with you,  
 Amen.