

Some of you came here today like those first women who came to the tomb: brokenhearted; expecting nothing really; maybe you've been to a few Easter morning worship services, you know what to expect.

Maybe you've been to **so many** you think that nothing could surprise you here.

Or you may be more like those poor guards that were so terrified they couldn't move or speak until the angel was gone.

Maybe life has been hard; and church maybe hasn't helped any.

Maybe the church has even beat you up at times. It can do that. We are all just broken people, like you, mostly trying to be faithful; sometimes not even trying very hard. We make mistakes. We can be petty. We can be selfish. We can be boring.

Or maybe it has nothing to do with church. Maybe you're just too hurt by life, or too skeptical to get very excited about anything;

Or maybe you're just too tired to care.

Maybe some of you, like some of the first disciples, consider all this talk of resurrection an "idle tale" and you do not believe.

You may believe that death is death;

that after all these years Jesus may deserve to be remembered as a great teacher and prophet. But resurrection is just wishful thinking, you think.

Some of you may have come here today to honor the memory of Jesus;

Or more likely to honor the memory of gathering in this place over the years; some of you may be here to make your parents happy or to honor an old tradition.

Some of us are probably just happy to be here at all after the struggle of getting the family dressed and fed and out the door on time.

It may feel like it's hardly worth it to get here. And so maybe you **don't** get here very often.

Whatever emotions you brought with you today, whatever motivations got you here today, rest assured that you are welcome here whatever your baggage! We've all got some; some of us just have an easier time hiding it under our Easter bonnet!

If enthusiastic alleluias are just too much for you, that's okay.
If you're having trouble with the science behind the dead being raised, that's fine, too.

You're not the first and you won't be the last.

This is a safe place where questions are welcome; where doubts are not considered the opposite of faith, but simply a natural part of a living, **growing** faith.

But, remember that when the women came to the tomb that first Easter morning, they came with NO expectations. They had no hope. All their hope had died on the cross. All their dreams had ended.

But when they arrived the tomb **was** empty.

They were greeted by the angel asking, "Why would you "look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen."

The only **logical** response to such a message is skepticism.

Confronted with a message like that it makes more sense to hold on to our belief in death.

The Easter claim that the tomb could not hold Jesus – that Jesus is loose in the world, **is** outrageous!

Or is it? Well, it would seem outrageous if all of your hopes and dreams had depended upon this Jesus, who you thought would save you.

If you thought Jesus was the one who would save you and then he was publically hung on a cross to die, sure you'd think resurrection was a ridiculous fairy tale, irrelevant to your life. Or if you were one of the thousands living in the area at the time that never even noticed the crucifixion, never heard of Jesus, never gave the strange weather and minor earthquake a second thought, resurrection would sound ridiculous to you.

If you thought God had sent Jesus to save you and he ended up dead on a cross, what could you think but, God has abandoned us; or even God is dead. We're on our own. This is all there is – the stench of death floating in the morning air.

But what if, as Flannery O'Connor said, "the virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection . . . are the **true** laws of the flesh and the physical. [What if] Death, decay, and destruction are the suspension of those laws. . . . [It] would never have occurred to human consciousness to conceive of purity if we were not to look forward to a resurrection of the body, which will be flesh and spirit united in peace, in the way they were in Christ. The resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature."

What if, "the virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection . . . are the **true** laws of the flesh and the physical. [What if] Death, decay, and destruction are the suspension of those laws. . . .

What if God has not abandoned us, but is calling us still. What if in order to hear God's call today, in our time, we have to give up on the Enlightenment project that has tried to convince us that reality is ONLY what can be catalogued and dissected; that reality is only that which can be replicated in a double-blind experiment.

What if we admit that that scientific method is good and useful for many things in life: curing diseases, expanding our knowledge for the good of all humanity.

But, what if we admit that that way of knowing has its limitations? The scientific method, logical deduction, controlled experimentation is useful in its own way. But it's useless at telling us what we need to know about the deeper questions of life.

It can't begin to define love that would die for a friend, let alone die for an enemy.

It can't begin to express the hope that wells up in the human heart at the sight of a sunrise or the smell of a newborn baby.

Logic will never tell you that you are the beloved of God and that God resurrected Jesus from a stinking tomb of death so that you would know that love so deeply that you could give your life to that love.

Dr. William Barclay writes, "It cost the life and death of Jesus to tell us all what God is like." "Without the life and death of Jesus," says Barclay, "we could never have known the fullness of what God is like.... If Jesus, in his love, had stopped short of the cross, it would have meant that there was somewhere beyond which the love of God would not go, that there was

something beyond which God would not forgive. On the cross, Jesus is saying, 'nothing -- absolutely nothing -- you can do can stop me from loving you!'"

Brené Brown is a sociologist who has done ground breaking work studying how vulnerability effects relationships and even affects our mental health. She experienced what she called a "spiritual awakening slash, mental breakdown." She describes it in a TED talk you can watch online.

In her talk Brené confides that when she experienced this breakdown she went to church to find comfort. Instead, she found challenge. "Church wasn't an epidural, it was a midwife. It just stood next to me and said 'Push, it's supposed to hurt a bit.'

That's the kind of faith experience and church experience we should expect from a church that follows a Messiah that hungered, wept, and cried out in despair. Life is hard, and faith doesn't help us escape that. But, it helps us deal with it."

She goes on to say, "God is love" is a solution if you think love is about hearts and bows and unicorns. But "God is love" takes on a whole new meaning when you realize love is hard, love is struggle, love is persevering through hardship. Love requires going through death to reach resurrection life.

Christian faith, it turns out, is all about vulnerability, because the only way to new life is through death. "Faith isn't for sissies."

We come here even on Easter morning with our questions, our vulnerability, willing to admit what we know and what we trust; what we can prove and what we take on faith.

But, if "The virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection . . . are the **true** laws of the flesh and the physical. [if] Death, decay, and destruction are the suspension of those laws. . . ."

Then hope lives;

tomorrow is pregnant with possibility;

death does not have the final word;

the powers and systems of this world are still desperately hanging on... but now, they're scared; they're on the run.

Because Jesus **lives**, not in a cold tomb, but he lives in the **heart** of each and every person who welcomes Him,

the past is not the predictor of the future;

old habits **can** be broken,
addictions can be overcome;
mortal enemies can become dear friends;
those we have hurt can **forgive** us.

Because Jesus lives, my addictions do not own me;
my failures do not define me;
the pain I have caused others can be forgiven.

Because Jesus lives, each day is a new birth,
another chance to live free,
sharing the love that has poured
down on us.

Because Jesus lives **here and now**, mystery lives side by side with science;
logic and reason have their place but they don't get the **ONLY**
place or place of highest honor.

Because Jesus lives, the space between people that appears to be empty ... is
important, since that's where there is room for relationships; for
creativity and growth.

Because Jesus lives, when people cause me pain,
I can see them as Jesus does.
I see **their** pain.
I can forgive them.

Because Jesus lives, his call to love my enemies
is **NOT** an impossible demand!
The reality is that there **ARE NO** enemies.
There is **no one** beyond my love because it is not me who loves
but **Jesus** loving them!

Because Jesus lives, this stirring deep within is the call of Jesus to open our
hearts and let him live in us;
let him make us his new creation.

Because Jesus is alive, healing can happen:
sometimes physical healing,
Sometimes reconciliation,

restored relationships,
the possibility of hope where none existed
before.

Because Jesus lives, all those loved ones who have died
are held in the same love that held Jesus
through those cold days of death.
The love that birthed resurrection will reunite us **all** again.

This claim for life cannot be proven by any measure
other than the **love** in the hearts of those
who **know Jesus** to be alive and free in the world today.

It cannot be proven by any measure other than the lives **changed**
by the love of Jesus.

It can only be measured by the love **shared** out of hearts overflowing
with a love so great that neither life nor death can contain it.

In a recent speech, the writer Anne Lamott offered her take on faith; she
said “It’s not take and figure it out, it’s take and eat.”

When you come forward this morning to receive the bread and wine,
remember that you open your hands to receive
not the memory of the dead Jesus.

You receive into **your** body the **living** body and blood of the resurrected One;
the one into whose death we are baptized so that Jesus can live in us and
so that we can live a life, not filled with hearts and bows and unicorns; which,
really isn’t life, at all, but delusion.

You receive the living Jesus so that your life will have meaning, and power; so
that you will bring hope to the people around you.

Death, decay and destruction have had their day. But, Jesus is here among us
calling us to **real** life where “the resurrection . . . is the **true** law of the flesh
and the physical.”

The tomb **is empty**.

Jesus lives. **God’s love wins!**