

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
20 April 2025

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Easter Sunday

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“The Evidence of Easter”

Part of the Annual theme, *Thriving in Goodness for Good and for GOOD*
Touchstone words in Lent/Easter: LAMENT and REJOICE

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Luke 24:1-12

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Grand *Alleluias* and Easter lilies. Crisp white paraments and a flowering cross. A Christ Light Processional, a festival string quartet, and the “Hallelujah” Chorus. A sanctuary full of folks dressed in their Sunday best. My, my.

We better be careful, Calvary! If anyone walks into our worship service today and sees ALL THIS—all this beauty and grandeur and pomp and circumstance—well...they might just think that we have seen the Risen Christ himself with our own two eyes.

Given the orchestrated joy with which we (and Christians the world over) celebrate Easter morning—anyone from the outside looking in would see ALL OF US in the midst of ALL OF THIS and think, “Wow! *they must* have real evidence of the Resurrection. How else could they be so certain in their celebration? So

sure of something that circumvents science and defies reason? What do they know that I don’t? What is all this fuss about?

The irony, of course, is that none of us have seen the Risen Christ with our own two eyes. None of us has any kind of demonstrative evidence, physical or circumstantial, that would stand a chance in a trial trying to prove the Resurrection.

Which begs the question, why are you here today? Why did you show up? What exactly are you celebrating this Easter? I mean *This* Easter Morning—April 20th Two Thousand Twenty Five—when all the evidence in the world points to the fact that Death does Defeat Life, that Empire does Win in the End, that the Innocent are Crucified Unjustly, and Grief hangs thick and heavy in the air? Open up the headlines right now, and open up your own

heart, and I'm willing to bet you fill find more reasons to Fear than to hold on to Faith.

In the Heartbreak of all that is happening in our country and world, and in the Heartache of the personal pains and struggles of your lives—what Hope do you hold onto? What Faith keeps you afloat? What Love led you here today? What Questions keep you coming back? What Evidence do you and I have for an occasion that warrants all this fancy fuss?

It's curious, isn't it? That 2,000+ years later, THIS (gesture around) is how we celebrate Easter morning? Because according to the folks who were actually around on that *first* Easter morning, the evidence of Easter was far more Mysterious than it was Miraculous—more Confusing than Clarifying—more Mournful than Merry—more Empty than Encouraging.

The Resurrection of Jesus was not some grand spectacular event witnessed by masses of people. Jesus had far grander events in his life. More people saw him walk on water, heal the lame, feed the 5,000, transfigure on a mountaintop, and ascend into the heaven than saw him rise from death on Easter

morning. You know how many people saw Jesus rise? None. None that we know of anyway.

And because no one saw it happen, because it was not some magic trick on a stage set up to make an audience gasp in shock or ooh and ahh in impressive wonder—the Resurrection will never quite be for us what we want it to be, will it? Obvious. Plain as Day. Provable. Reassuring of every Faith Question, evidence to eliminate all doubt. But just because the Resurrection is none of those things; it doesn't mean it's not Real. It just means that when we think of it as a singular event happening to one man in one moment (even if he is the Son of God!), perhaps we're missing the point, maybe we still have yet to grasp the true “good” in the “Good News.” The Resurrection has never just been about Jesus being Raised from the dead; it's always been about what is being Raised up within us!

And raising up an entire people from one way of understanding how the world works to another takes A LOT MORE TIME than simply raising one man from death to life. You see, what came to be called the “Good News” was a gradual unfolding,

a slow dawning, a communal process of conferring with one another and “raising awareness” together...not all at the same pace, and certainly not all landing in the same place in terms of what people believe or understand. The Good News is very inclusive of all of us, no matter where we are on the journey...which is part of what makes the news so Good!

As the women make their way to the tomb, deeply in grief, fully expecting to anoint Jesus’ dead body with spices, they are simply putting one foot in front of the other, doing the next right thing they knew to do when someone dies. As they arrive in the early dawn hours, they expect to find a stone sealing the tomb, but unexpectedly it is rolled away. They expect to find Jesus’ body in the tomb, but find instead no body, and nobody. They are perplexed.

The first evidence of Easter was Emptiness. Absence, not presence.

For those of us here today who are gutted by grief, who feel hollow and alone, who are isolated by depression—hear this Good News: Emptiness is the first Evidence of Easter. There is evidence of Easter in

not finding what you are looking for, or life not going as expected or according to plan.

It is a perplexing and painful feeling, to realize that how you expected things to go is not how they are going, or that what you went looking for, you cannot find. But the first Evidence of Easter is that the women Remain in the Emptiness. They do not run from it.

And then, all of the sudden, into the Emptiness, comes Presence. Not the Presence of the Person they were looking for, the Person they loved or, the Body they came to adorn though. No, into the Emptiness and Absence comes a Sparkle...and a Shimmer. Two men in dazzling clothes. Why dazzling clothes? Probably because in the fog of grief and the pain of Emptiness of what they had their hearts and minds set on but did not see or find, God knew that the women would need something a little “extra” to catch their eye. Plus, it feels like angels or heavenly beings are always a little “extra.” After all, Luke introduces the birth of Jesus by angels hovering above the shepherds in the darkness of the night sky, alone as they were, on the margins of society. These lowly shepherds were probably

nodding off to sleep when something a little “extra” happens, right? “*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*” pops off in the sky, and God chooses the Shepherds, the Loners, the Protectors of the Sheep, the Nomads of the Night—to dazzle with a whole heavenly host of angel choirs!

So if that’s how the news of Jesus’ birth happened and *to whom* it was announced—then we shouldn’t be surprised that the news of Jesus’ re-birth, his resurrection, would be to another group of people in the night—grieving women, the ones faithful to their Savior ‘behind the scenes.’ It shouldn’t be surprising that once again God sends angels or dazzling beings to speak to those on the margins, those not given official status of “disciple,” those who have low standing in society, those who are not listened to, those who are doing the unglamorous duty of preserving the dignity of dead with spices.

Don’t you love how God chooses to dazzle and shine on those whom the world would rather dull out or have fade into the background?

And here’s the best part...It is these two odd men, in dazzling clothes, who spark the memory of faith for the women. They do not bring to them any new evidence or information from “on high.” They don’t tell them secret knowledge or “insider info” that some people get to have and others don’t. No, they simply REMIND them of what they *already knew to be true*, of what Jesus told them while he was with them, “*He is not here, but has risen. REMEMBER HOW HE TOLD YOU, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man would be handed over to sinners, crucified and on the third day rise again?*” (Luke 24:5-7). Remember?

Luke tells us that as soon as the men say remember, that the women do in fact remember. Verse 8: “***then they remembered his words.***” Again, this is so important: The angels don’t tell the women anything they don’t already know; they remind them of what they already know to be true...what they know from their own life experiences, their own journeys of faith, their own listening and learning from the teachings of Jesus.

There is Evidence of Easter to be found in Emptiness and Uncertainty and there is

Evidence of Easter to be found
within us and within the
knowledge of our own
experience and truth, within our
own memories.

Sometimes we just need
someone else to prompt us *to*
remember. To give us
permission to trust that what we
heard and felt and believed
before IS STILL TRUE
TODAY, even when death or
disease or injustice changes
things—sometimes we just need
to be reminded that Truth is still
Truth that Love still Wins and
that Jesus said he would Rise
and he did!

Maybe you are here today just
needing to be reminded to
remember what you know and
to trust the truth within you. It
may have been hidden or buried
by situation or circumstance, but
it is still there.

Sometimes the Evidence of
Easter just needs to be
unearthed from what life has
buried deep...to remember what
we have forgotten.

And did you notice how it is
only after the women
REMEMBER this truth about
their faith and reclaim it by
sharing it with others that Luke
gives us the names of the

women? Mary Magdalene,
Joanna, Mary the mother of
James. It's almost as if in the
remembering of the Good News
that was already within them but
needed unearthing, that they
were re-membered as full
persons...named distinctly as
individuals...their stories and
testimonies rising up not just to
inspire others but to heal their
own grief and disbelief too.

A reclaiming and remembering
of faith can do that for us. It can
make us feel like ourselves
again, like while we might not
have all the pieces of the puzzle,
there is a clearer picture that is
coming into view. There is a
Story of Truth and Love and
Belonging that rises above all
the stories we tell ourselves and
that the world tells us about who
we are or aren't, or how we're
not enough or too much...or
what we should or shouldn't be
doing, or what rights we deserve
or don't—and that Bigger Story,
the One we call the Good
News...it brings us more fully
into our own divinely created
goodness. If the Good News is
not helping your true self rise
up, then you have the wrong
news and you need to change
the channel.

Perhaps you are here today not
because you do not have faith,

but just because you need to be reminded about the Good News, and remember that the faith you have within you, the experiences of God and the divine that live in your memories—they are still active and relevant today. Resurrection is never one moment. It's always a gradual unfolding. Easter is evidenced over time, and it's evidenced in *community*. We cannot understand the magnitude of what God is telling us on Easter Sunday without helping one another understand it. Without sharing our own testimonies of new life, without reminding each other to remember, without prompting each other to belief.

But even as the Evidence of Easter is discovered in community, it can get distorted in community too.

Sometimes (a lot of times) the Good News will sound like an Idle Tale. Like something that is too good to be true. And that is understandable. I imagine the Eleven and the Others all stood around in their “church parking lot” that day processing and going over things again and again, and just talked themselves in circles. Getting stuck in thought cycles of their life experience that tells them

that dead people don't rise. That Hope doesn't prevail. That Love manipulated by Lies. That Fear is more palpable than Faith.

We know exactly what this is like. Just turn on your 24/7 cable news or scroll through the algorithm of your social media, and it's clear that a lot of forces are at play to keep us talking in circles and spinning in despair...which of course, would make any kind of talk of God defeating Death, or of Love having the last word over Suffering, or of Hope rising up in Pain...feel like an “idle tale.”

There are a lot of good reasons to be spiraling and freaking out right now about the state of our country and world, and we can spin ourselves silly until we are passed out from dizziness. But the more we stay sucked into that vortex, the more we will feel like the Good News of God's Love and Christ's Hope is an ‘idle tale’...even when we hear it from trustworthy voices!

It's really hard to raise ourselves out of the all the bad news, to hear and find the Good News...unless...we do just that! Unless we rise up and raise up. Unless, we peel ourselves away from our screens, away from the 24/7 cycle of doom and gloom,

and follow Peter as he runs back to the Tomb.

Peter, in the midst of all the “idle tale” gossip and spiraling, decides to turn that channel off for a moment, and go check things out for himself. He pulls himself away from the Bad News, to search for the Good News. And he doesn’t find something dazzling or spectacular. He finds an Empty Tomb too. He walks into Emptiness, but there is something there. Something, ordinary this time, not shimmering or sparkling. It was just some folded linen cloths. But it was something that touched Jesus, a small something that was connected to Jesus. It wasn’t a lot, but it was just enough, for him to be amazed.

And there it is. More Evidence of Easter: our Amazement. Our willingness to break away from all that we are seeing and experiencing around us, from all the idle tales and awful injustices, not to abandon the people who need us or the people who are suffering, but to find a moment of amazement, or replenishment. Something to anchor us to our faith once again. To not let anyone else tell us that the Good News of Life,

Hope, Peace, Justice, and Love is an ‘idle tale,’ but to peel away from all that “idle tale” and take a look for ourselves in the Empty Tomb. To walk into the place that feels like All Hope is Lost, or that Death has Won, and see if there just might be something there. Even something as ordinary as folded linens, but that is yet, a “touchstone to Jesus,” a “reminder of faith.” A sign of something beyond just what we thought or knew was possible. Something, perhaps, that just makes us wonder a bit more, even if it doesn’t answer our questions.

There are ordinary acts of Love, Justice, Peace, and Hope happening every day that look as ordinary as folded linen cloths, but we miss them because of all the voices telling us that the hope of the Risen Christ can’t be true, that it’s an “idle tale.” And because of that, instead of walking into the Tombs of all that is hard to understand in our world, we just stay away, and when we do that, we miss the chance of experiencing Resurrection. If we don’t walk directly into those Tombs or Places of Grief or Emptiness or Disbelief or Pain...we just might miss the Hope and Good News that Jesus

Rose from the dead. And if we miss that Good News, then we also miss the chance to be transformed by it. And when we aren't transformed by the Good News, neither is the world.

You see, we must not only see the Evidence of Easter around us, we must become the Evidence of Easter ourselves.

We have Empires authorizing crucifixions all around us. The Powerful are Pulling all the Strings to Silence Justice, Ignore Dignity, Mock Truth, Hoard Wealth, and Strip Away Rights. And they are doing it in the name of Jesus, Lord have mercy. On Easter we celebrate the Power of the Risen Christ, but let us not be confused, Jesus may be full of All Power, but that does not mean that all Power is full of Jesus (no matter what those *in power* say about their faith).

But we, ourselves, do become full of the power of Jesus, when we transform our very lives into the lasting Evidence of Easter for the world. We are the Evidence of Easter. You and me. We evidence Easter when we Remain in Emptiness but do

not Run Away. When we listen to the testimony of others and allow it to remind us of our own. When we share our story, with others, and how we keep sharing, even when it's not received or said to be an 'idle tale.' And when choose to walk away from the all the idle voices spinning in circles to search out and seek out the Spirit of the Risen Christ, who comes to us in amazement, in wonder, in beauty, and in grace.

"I know that the rationalist in us all would like to have a little proof of the Resurrection. One of my mentors and teachers, the late Rev. Prof. Peter J. Gomes says that preachers on Easter often sound like attorneys producing evidence, arguing from reason and science that this proposal of 'bodily resurrection' is at least plausible and possible. But what is being proclaimed in the Gospel transcends reason and intellect; it confounds what we think we know, and it addresses our spirits, our souls, our love, and our deepest hope. And no data, no evidence, no Da Vinci Code, no Gospel of Judas, no Shroud of Turin, can ever satisfactorily prove or disprove it."¹

¹ John Buchanan, "The End is the Beginning," Sermon from Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, Illinois (16 April 2006), accessed on April 20, 2025 at

<https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2006/041606.html>.

Gomes says,

“The evidence of Easter is a reconfigured Easter people, people who are no longer afraid of the dark, people who dare to live by their affections and not by their fears, people who know that they need not die in order to truly experience resurrection living, . . . people who fear neither death nor life. . . .

In short, people such as you and me who aspire to be people like that.

We are the Easter people, for death, in all of its cynical, calculating, greedy ways, no longer has control over us. We have a better idea, we claim a greater truth, we live because we are loved; and because we are loved, we can live.”²

And because we live, the Gospel still does too. We are Evidence of Easter, and sometimes we need reminding and prompting and a reason to be amazed. So perhaps we need all this pomp and circumstance and celebration, after all. Not for Jesus sake, but for our own.

We have been to the Empty Tomb this morning. Now, what evidence do we have to show for it?

Amen.

² Peter J. Gomes, *What We Forgot to Tell You* (Cambridge, MA: Memorial Church, Harvard University), January 1, 2003.