

“In the Light of the Resurrection”
April 5, 2026

I Corinthians 15:20, 53-58
Luke 24:1-12

When does Easter begin?

It depends.

It depends on what Gospel you’re reading.

The Gospel of John says that the women arrived at the tomb early on the first day of the week while it was still dark.

The Gospel of Mark says that they came when the sun had risen.

And Luke tells us it was at early dawn—that time between the dark of night and light of day—when the women who had long followed Jesus went to the tomb.

When does Easter begin?

It depends.

It depends on when the morning dawns.

In one of my favorite poems, Robert Frost says, “I have been one acquainted with the night.” This describes many of us.

We are living through a time when the shadows to loom large. I need not recount this morning all the reasons that make us feel we are living through a time when the night is very familiar.

In describing the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday, Luke says, “Darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed.” It was not an eclipse, which would have been impossible given the full moon at the time of the Passover. Nor do we need to explain this, as some try to, as the result of a dust storm. The Gospel is telling us that the powers of evil loose in the world were doing their very best. The death of Jesus is the judgment that, even at noon, humankind is well acquainted with the night.

The night is still with us.

But Easter comes to us as a dawning, as the start of a new day, a new week. It is the time when our eyes are opened; it is a time when we might see with clarity the new possibilities set before us.

Of course, what we see—and what we *don't* see—can be a problem for us as Easter dawns. Years ago, when I was much younger and didn't know all the dangers of preaching, during an Easter sermon, I told about the women arriving at the tomb. I asked with great rhetorical flourish: “Where is Jesus?” A three-year-old girl visiting with her grandparents that day, who was obviously unfamiliar with the niceties of worship yelled out for all in the congregation to hear: “I DON'T KNOW!”

While this is not the reason that we dismiss the younger people to children's church before the sermon, since then I have been much more cautious about asking questions when I preach.

And yet, that little girl's loud uncertainty over the whereabouts of Jesus gives voice to our own uncertainty as well.

The tomb—what is there and what isn't there—is a problem for many. So, I want to approach it slowly.

Let us start then, with Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul wrote his letters to the early churches some 20 years after the crucifixion and before any of the Gospels were written. He writes with confidence to the Christians in Corinth: “In fact Christ has been raised from the dead.” Yet he seems to know nothing of the accounts of the empty tomb. He never mentions those Easter morning stories when writing about the resurrection.

A lot of breath has been spent in Easter sermons trying to “prove” the resurrection, trying to argue people into belief. But what convinced Paul and the other early Christians that Jesus had risen from the dead were neither the arguments of others nor an empty tomb. What convinced the people that Jesus had risen from the dead was a living presence that called them into new life.

In the risen Christ the power of death has been defeated. So Paul can write: “Be steadfast”—that is, stand firm in the face of the winds and experience that can blow against you. The harsh judgments of others, or the adversity that comes with taking a principled but unpopular stand, or the simple bad breaks of life might threaten to crush your spirit. God, however, has begun something good in you and will bring it to completion.

Because God is working within us, to be steadfast is to be flexible and resilient—like a tree that can bend without breaking. It is to be active and involved—abounding in the work of God. You can be generous in giving; you can love with abandon. You can give yourself to those you love, to the causes that claim your heart. You can walk in the way of peace in a world that celebrates violence; you can work for justice in a world that favors power and wealth; you can speak the truth in a world that prefers easy lies. You can laugh and sing and dance.

Be steadfast.

In his prison cell in Nazi Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood what that might mean for the world and for us. “From the resurrection of Christ... a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world. If a few people really believed that and acted on it in their daily lives, a great deal could be changed. To *live* in the light of the resurrection—that is what Easter means.”

You can live in the light of the resurrection—that is what Easter means.

We can do this because in the resurrected Christ our labor is not in vain. The good that we do does not end with our defeat or even with our death. By God’s power our works continue, still bearing fruit.

Yes, death is real. And death is an enemy. But we have heard once more the startling good news that death has been swallowed up in victory, that we can live fully because Christ is risen.

The resurrection means that this time, *these days* are filled with great significance. The work of God that we do—the work that God does *through us*—is a part of the future that God is making. One person put it this way: “Acts of justice and mercy, the creation of beauty and the celebration of truth, deeds of love and the creation of communities of kindness and forgiveness—these all matter, and they matter forever.”

With that awareness, then, let us approach that empty tomb once more.

All four Gospels acknowledge that women come to the tomb first. As Luke tells it, on a Sunday morning Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women come to tomb. On the previous Friday they saw how the body of the crucified Jesus was put in this rock-hewn tomb. On their arrival, they see that the stone that had sealed the entrance is rolled away. Going inside the tomb, they do not find the body.

They are “perplexed,” Luke says. That is the effect that Jesus often had on his followers. It was always difficult to get a grip on what he was saying, what he was doing. But this is at a new level.

As the women try to make sense of this startling reality, two men in dazzling clothes show up. Luke doesn’t come right out and say it, but in describing what seems to be the first occasion of people all dressed up for Easter, he is suggesting that these two are angels—a word, you will remember, that simply means “messenger.”

The message the women receive is straightforward: “He is not here, but has risen.” These words must have echoed oddly in their ears, as though they were hearing some unknown language. In an attempt to clarify things, these messengers ask: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

We, of course, all know what those angels were getting at when they asked this of the women. Jesus was not to be found among the tombs. Christ was alive. Death could not hold him. “Go, look elsewhere for the living Christ who goes before you.”

Now, I’m not one who normally argues with angels—which, let’s face it, is a losing proposition in most cases.

But maybe we *should* look for the living among the dead. “Among the dead” might be just the place to look for the living.

Indeed, it is our calling to be the living among the dead.

We are called to be the living among the dead, living in the light of the resurrection, among those who still insist on the hatred that continues to fuel much of our nation’s discourse.

We are called to be the living among the dead, living in the light of the resurrection, among those who want to continue the long history of violence and warfare.

We are called to be the living, living in the light of the resurrection, among those who continue to exploit the poor of this nation, this world, who continue to exploit our increasingly fragile home, this earth.

We are called to be the living among the dead, announcing by both our words and our actions that God is bringing about a new creation, bringing joy,

bringing peace. The risen Christ is the first sign of this new creation, offering new life to all who follow.

We will not always be welcomed in the same way that we would welcome others.

We will not always be embraced in the same way that we would embrace others.

Yet at times the light that we, the living, bring will be seen as a welcome dawn in the darkness, a sign that Easter is indeed beginning.

“He is not here,” the women are told. “He is risen.” We aren’t told how. We aren’t told when. Nobody ever knew exactly what happened because nobody was there to see it.

And we’re still trying to understand just what “risen from the dead” means. We wrestled with that in the adult education sessions in recent weeks. We wrestle with it throughout the year.

Still, the women tell others what they were told. As is the case in all the Easter stories, a lot of people had their doubts. A lot of people still struggle with what all this might mean.

Yet, upon hearing the witness of the women, Peter does run to the tomb. In Bach’s *Easter Oratorio* Peter sings” “Laughter and merriment attend our hearts, for our Salvation is risen.” Luke tells us Peter then comes home amazed—laughing all the way.

In the struggle of life and death, God has had the last laugh.

This is the light of the resurrection: not certainty about what has happened; but certainly, amazement. Certainly laughter and merriment.

When does Easter begin?

Easter begins when the day breaks in your soul so that with hope and joy and maybe a little trepidation you go from this place to be one who shows new life in Christ in the way that only you can show it.

Easter begins when through your unique and special being, the light God dawns in the shadow places of our world.