



*Rev Chris Taylor - 4-21-19*

*"He Has Risen!"*

*Isaiah 65:17-25 - Luke 24:1-12*

There are a number of people that I want to recognize and thank this morning. First, I think of our wonderful choir and the leadership of David Billings and Guy Russo – what a blessing they have been to us: the Sponsorship Concert two weeks ago, then Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Can you imagine this season without their music?

Then so many others: our ushers; our caretakers; our leadership – the members of Session and Deacons along with all their committees and all they do to help this church function. I think of our office staff; my colleagues in ministry; those who have contributed these beautiful flowers; and, of course, all of you – the congregation itself whose ongoing support is really what makes all these ministries possible. How blessed we are with such a beautiful church family!

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Back when I was very young, there was an amusement park called Glen Echo several miles away that held a kind of magical place in my life. I first heard about it when one of my older brothers was going with a friend. He talked about all the great rides there and the amazing time he was going to have. I begged to go but was told I was too young. So I asked him how you get to Glen Echo, and he pointed in some vague direction and said it was over there. And so it was that at three years old I set off down Georgetown Pike on my tricycle in search of Glen Echo. My frantic mother found me about an hour later, and needless to say, that particular adventure did not end well.

I finally did make it to the amusement park in the years that followed. I was fascinated by everything about it – the cacophonous mix of people's screams and grinding machinery and the carousel's calliope; the smell of popcorn and diesel oil, caramel coated apples and cotton candy; mysterious rides beckoning me into their dark interior and all the bright colors and constant motion. But always, rising high above everything else, stood the majestic, wooden roller coaster.

How I envied the older kids who could ride the coaster. I watched them and learned the rituals: raising the hands to try and touch the warning sign posted over the long climb to the first great hill. And then the obligatory screams as the cars dropped down the other side.

The first couple of times we went to the park, I kept tugging at my dad, asking him if we could go on the roller coast. Looking back, I think I must have been around seven or eight when he finally gave in. I remember my sense of anticipation as we climbed up that first, steep hill – the chains clanking rhythmically beneath us. I wanted to get everything just right, so I raised my

hands as we passed under the sign. I told my dad that's what you are supposed to do. And then, as we rounded the curve, I got ready to scream just like everyone else, and that's when something totally unexpected happened.

When we were at the top of the hill I found myself looking straight down into an abyss far, far below. I froze. My mouth was open, but nothing came out. I was terrified, and to my horror I couldn't utter the simplest sound. The whole ride became a kind of frantic blur – the hairpin turns, the sudden shifts in direction – and all the while part of me was wondering what had happened to my voice while another part held onto the safety bar in front of me with desperate urgency.

It was only towards the very end that my equilibrium began to come back; that I could begin to breathe and perhaps even speak. I was still shaky as my dad and I climbed out of the car. Of course, I wanted to try it again. I wanted to get it right. But to this day I'll never forget that first experience of soul-gripping terror. In all the years since, I've never experienced anything quite like it again.

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I think about that ride when I hear Luke describe the women's encounter with the two men in the garden. He says they were terrified. Did they choose to fall to the ground, or in their terror did their legs simply give out beneath them? Did they bow their heads out of reverence, or were they so horrified they couldn't bear to look?

This wasn't just fear that gripped them. It was terror. The encounter was something unlike anything they had ever experienced before. They had no context in which to frame it. No mental clips from which to draw. Two men in dazzling clothes. It was the divine breaking in, and the reaction of these women – the terror that seized them – makes me wonder if perhaps we haven't become too familiar in our approach to God.

Through all of Scripture, the one consistent reaction to a theophany (a manifestation of the divine) has always been great fear. In fact, the first words we see again and again are "Do not be afraid." Where is our own sense of awe in the presence of God? This, after all, is that One who brought all creation into being. Where is our sense of humility – who are we to come before the Lord? A true understanding of God's nature should shatter any tendency on our part to place our faith, our spirituality, into some comfortable, predictable box that we can presumably control. The living God is so much bigger, so much greater. Most assuredly, there is nothing safe about Him.

The messengers offer three words to the women. Let's take just a moment and consider each.

The first: "*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*" Of course, that is exactly where our own inclinations tend to lead us. We tend to prefer what is past, and look back on it with longing. We want to hold on to what has always been. A friend of mine was recently

interviewing with a large church down south. She spoke of the need to be open, the need to change, and one of the co-chairs of the search committee responded tersely, “We don’t need to change. We just need to expand.”

But change is part of life itself; part of what it means to be alive. A seed becomes a plant becomes a flower. Constant change. Constant movement. And even when we know the seed we’ve planted, the final flower that emerges holds elements of surprise – its size and shape; its shading and colors.

We cannot worship the living God and remain stuck in the past. We can be grateful for it. We can remember and celebrate what has been. But we worship a living God. Don’t look for the living among the dead. Don’t hold on to what was and miss the amazing thing that God is doing here and now. Be open to that new life which is constantly breaking in.

The second word: “*He is not here, but has risen*” Risen where? We know full well what lies above us: the sky, the moon, the sun and stars... millions of solar systems; countless galaxies that lie beyond our own. Risen where?

Risen, moved into that kingdom which lies all around us; the Kingdom of God; all eternity – as near to us in this moment as the air we breathe. It is that realm where God is fully present; that space where God’s will is fully realized; that place where time itself no longer exists in any recognizable form. The Kingdom of God is like another dimension just beyond our own; just beyond what we are able to touch and see and know.

With his resurrection Jesus tore the curtain. He revealed to us what lies beyond us and all around us. He is alive. He is here. He is with us still.

The third word: “*Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.*” Remember. That’s where we need to turn to understand Jesus. It is where he turned on the road to Emmaus to help his followers. He used Scripture to interpret the meaning of his ministry. It was Scripture that showed those first followers how all the different pieces fit together.

Have you ever seen one of those wooden puzzles that you can put together to form a sphere or cube? I could never figure them out without the instructions, but it was always very satisfying to take those different piece and find how they came together to form the finished product. Our lives are something like those puzzles: so many different pieces – our families, our work, our hobbies and finances and sexuality and spirituality. How do they fit together?

It is Jesus who shows us the way. It is Jesus who offers a glimpse of life as God intended it. And it is here, in the pages of Scripture, that we find the instructions. Some fifty years ago, I gave my life to Jesus. I believed then that he was and is the very Son of God. I believe it still. And what I’ve found, and what millions of others have found down through the centuries, is that this journey with him can be so glorious that it takes your breath away: takes your breath away not in terror, but in wonder at the sheer beauty of the life he offers.

Jesus is risen! Jesus is alive, and that one truth changes everything.