

Every Christian community, every Christian church, at its founding, declares its core values for all time when it chooses its name.

- A church named Christ Church, for example, declares that Christ and Christ's mission are at the core of its identity.
- A church named St. Thomas, for example, declares itself a place where "show me" people are welcome, a place where skeptics come to believe in Christ Jesus.

I say this today because we are Church of the **Resurrection**. So, this day is our Feast Day, the day in the Christian year that most closely declares what is core to our community's culture and values: Jesus' Resurrection to new life. In other words, we know that the TOMB IS EMPTY, and we know WHY: "Christ is alive! let Christians sing."

We at Church of the Resurrection don't dwell on **us** on our Feast day, though. After all, this is **Easter Sunday**, the day we remember that Christ Jesus rose from the dead. Our focus on this day is the **living Christ**, and the difference that Jesus' resurrection makes in our lives.

Full truth be told though, full disclosure: Maybe at some time in our lives, metaphorically speaking, we each have gotten up early to take spices to Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday, not expecting the tomb to be empty. We have even stood in Jesus' tomb, again metaphorically speaking, and declared what a great person Jesus must have been, what an insightful teacher, what a proficient healer, not even noticing that there is no dead body, not even acknowledging that Jesus' tomb is forever **empty**.

If so, I forgive you, because it is here at Church of the Resurrection that we can dare to enter the tomb and discover that the tomb really is empty. Here at Church of the Resurrection, we can discover the hope that the empty tomb gives us: hope for a new life in the here and now, and hope for life after our death. Aren't WE, Church of the Resurrection, filled with hope, living (as we are) a corporate resurrected life?

However, those women disciples of Jesus who visited his tomb early on that first day of the week after his crucifixion were not filled with hope when they first discovered that the tomb was empty. Scripture tells us those women were **perplexed**. They tried to suss out what had happened to the body, not guessing that Jesus had returned to life. **Those** women know what **we all know**: dead bodies just don't vacate their tombs.

The women's perplexion soon ended, though. But instead of being enlightened, they next became terrified. This was because "two men in dazzling clothes" had just appeared with them in the tomb. Suddenly the tomb wasn't empty anymore, but it was filled with otherworldly looking people. We often

think that these two were angels. However, I doubt that because they failed to express the usual angelic greeting. You know the angelic greeting: **“Fear not.”** No, THESE two were not angels, probably not angels.

The last time we saw THESE two figures, I’m speculating, was on a mountain top with a transfigured Jesus discussing Jesus’ “exodus” from Jerusalem. Now **here** they were, with **their** clothes all dazzlingly white. But where was Jesus?

We don’t know where Jesus was physically when the women visited his empty tomb. However, I’ve been thinking all this week about **the message** these two delivered, directly and indirectly, to all of Jesus’ disciples:

- “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” they asked.
- “He is not here, but risen,” they said, and
- “Remember what he taught you.”

This, I contend, is the basis for our Easter hope, born in that empty tomb:

- **Death is not** our final end,
- Death can lead to new life by remembering and living what Jesus taught us.

So, Church of the Resurrection, what DID Christ Jesus teach us?

- **Love.**
 - Love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind, and
 - Love our neighbor as ourselves.
- And who is our neighbor? Everyone!
 - No matter their ethnicity,
 - No matter their beliefs,
 - No matter, even, their actions.
 - Everyone who needs help, regardless of their culpability in needing help.
 - Everyone who needs help, regardless of their background or social status or their documentation.
- Love, to see and act on the needs of those around us.
- Love, to see every single person as a human being with value and worth, beloved by God.

This is at the very core of our Christian belief: The tomb was and is empty. Jesus was not there; Jesus is risen. When the women first entered the empty tomb, Jesus was in the wilderness of this life for just 40 days longer, but he was headed for the Promised Land. Jesus' exodus had been achieved.

Now, you may not believe that the tomb was empty, or that Jesus is Resurrected. You might still think that this news I am rejoicing in today is merely an "idle tale." I hope you didn't expect me (or anyone else) to explain how the Resurrection happened or to prove it in some way. I hope and pray you don't think this event we are celebrating today is only an "idle tale." An "idle tale" is a made-up story, one that is nonsensical, not credible or believable. In the original Greek, it is even stronger. It means "utter nonsense."

So, if today's story is "utter nonsense" to you, I urge you to suspend disbelief and claim the new life promised by the empty tomb. When we participate in Jesus' life of love, his resurrection becomes our own resurrection, beginning in the here and now. When we participate in Jesus' life of love, the empty tomb becomes more than just "an idle tale." The tomb was empty and we cannot explain how that could be. Instead, we just have to live as life of love, knowing that death is not our final end.

Alleluia, the Lord is Risen.

The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!