

**HE HAS RISEN**  
**Sermon for Easter Sunday, 2026**  
**John 20:1-18**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from John 20:1-18, our Gospel reading read before:  
Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On the morning of Christ's resurrection, His disciples were confronted with a strange set of facts, things they were not at all expecting to find.

A group of women, also disciples of Jesus, had gone out to the tomb where He had been laid. They knew its location because they had watched as Jesus' lifeless body was laid to rest in the Garden, in Joseph's new tomb, not far from the place of the crucifixion. When they went to the tomb, they expected to find it with a large stone blocking the entrance. However, what they found was an open tomb. *What did this mean?*

They did not immediately have the answer, but then, when they did, the answer that first occurred to one of them *was wrong*. Only when they remembered the Scriptures were they able to draw the right conclusion from the strange and unexpected set of facts that confronted them that morning.

Each Easter, as we hear the familiar story, we follow those first disciples through that process of discovery, past the false and misleading conclusions, to the amazing and joyous truth that the empty tomb means that Christ has risen. We do this again today, so that we may see the glorious truth of the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ anew and see clearly what it means for us.

So, first, we consider what the empty tomb *does not mean*, for, as we have said, some false conclusions were drawn from early reports of it.

John mentions Mary Magdalene. Mary was from the village of Magdala and had previously been accompanying and supporting Jesus as He travelled through the towns and villages proclaiming the Good News. We are told that Mary had been freed from seven demons that had afflicted her.<sup>1</sup> Although John mentions only Mary Magdalene, we know from the other gospels that others were with her. Anyway, John describes how **“on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”**

Mary running to Peter and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) was a sign of distress, and the conclusion she drew about the now-open tomb was *partly true* and *partly false*.

Mary correctly assumed that the *body of Jesus was gone*. She incorrectly assumed that *someone must have removed the body and taken it somewhere else*. Full of anxiety and sadness, Mary did not know that Jesus had risen from the dead. Her happiness still depended on His visible presence. If she couldn't see Jesus, then she imagined that she was *deprived of Him*.

Yet we should not be *overly harsh* on Mary and her initial mistaken conclusions about the empty tomb. She is a good example to us in her love and devotion to Jesus, which prompted her to go to His tomb. She **“came to the tomb early, while it was still dark,”** and arrived despite knowing it could bring her more sorrow. Although that journey to the tomb initially filled her with anxiety and fear, it ultimately led her to the risen Christ and to joy in Him.

Mary didn't recognise Jesus out there in the Garden when He physically appeared before her, and

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 8:1-2

maybe we wonder why. John doesn't tell us, other than that she thought He was the gardener who kept up the gravesite. After her encounter with the two angels sitting in the tomb, **“she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did know that it was Jesus.”** We also know that after the resurrection others of Jesus' followers didn't recognise Jesus immediately either.<sup>2</sup> Continuing, **“<sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me...”** Mary's emotions bounced in a moment from rock bottom to heavenly heights as she realised who was talking to her. She not only found Jesus' body as she wished, but she also had Jesus *alive* with her.

We can imagine her wanting to take hold of Jesus and embrace Him in welcome, anticipating a return to the way things were. She would scarcely want to let Him go!

We should also not fail to come to the cross and grave of Christ, to meditate on His death. We should not be afraid to face the cross, which means *facing our own sin and guilt*. Only through the cross and repentance can we come to the resurrection, where we shall find forgiveness and peace.

The empty tomb is not a cause for anxiety or fear, but rather for excitement and amazement. We see this in the conduct of Peter and John when they heard Mary Magdalene's report. They immediately headed for the tomb to see for themselves. They did not walk but ran in a virtual footrace, in which John outran Peter. The news of the empty tomb was the first light of day to break the gloom of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. It stirred the disciples to excitement and activity. Stooping to look inside the empty tomb, John **“saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.”**

We can imagine their amazement, not only because of what was not there, but also because of what was. They were amazed at what they *did not see* and at what they *did see*. They did not see the body of Christ, but they saw the linen burial cloths lying there. What could all this mean?

Even today, when we approach the empty tomb already understanding its significance, *we should still do so with a sense of wonder and awe*, for in Christ's empty tomb, we encounter something extraordinary, something truly miraculous. It is the opposite of what we usually see and experience: that people die and are buried. The tombs and graves of this world are not empty; they are full, for in Adam *all die*.<sup>3</sup> We are all sinners like our father Adam, and so we shall die as he did, but in Christ's empty tomb, we have the promise of resurrection and eternal life.

When we understand the meaning of the empty tomb, we are brought from fear and anxiety, from mere excitement and amazement to joy and peace. The evangelist John is the first to realise that Jesus has risen. He is the reporter here, and he tells us when the light of the resurrection first dawned on him. It was when he went into the tomb and saw that the body of Jesus was not there — only the linen cloths were there, peacefully folded in silent testimony of the body that had lately occupied them. John tells us that it was then that he **“went in, and he saw, and believed.”** Suddenly, it hit him: *“Jesus has risen from the dead.”* This was for John the beginning of joy and peace.

But why did the disciples not believe *immediately* upon seeing the empty tomb? Why did it not occur to them *immediately* that Jesus had risen from the dead? John here gives the reason: **“for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”**

Notice that he does not say that it was because Jesus *had not yet appeared to them*.

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<sup>2</sup> John 21:4; Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:16, 37

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22

The faith of the disciples in the resurrection of Christ was not to be based first of all upon the appearances of Christ but on the Old Testament Scriptures in which the resurrection was prophesied. Christ's resurrection had been prophesied in the Old Testament. For example, in Psalm 16, Jesus speaks through the prophet David, saying, "*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see decay*" (16:10).

When Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He directed them to the Scriptures and explained them to them. Luke records that after His resurrection, He said to them, "*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. 'And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day'*" (Luke 24:44-46). Their faith was to rest upon the Word of the living God, making it a pattern for us so that *even though we have not seen, we still believe that Christ has risen from the dead.*

Faith in the resurrection of Christ is also for us the start of joy and peace. When we believe that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after being crucified, we feel joy because we know He has defeated death. He was put to death as the sacrifice for our sins. He was raised to confirm that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father, so we are now justified. Instead of death and the grave, we have a confident hope of eternal life. Believing that Jesus arose from the dead gives us peace, knowing that all our sins are fully forgiven.

We can live without fear of death and judgement. The empty tomb proves that our Saviour Jesus Christ has risen. He is the Resurrection and the Life, and anyone who lives and believes in Him will never die. He is risen, He is risen indeed! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.