

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on April 17, 2022 (Easter Day, Year C)

There's a certain order to Easter Day, certain traditions we follow that remind us that today is special and different. At church, we begin by singing, "Jesus Christ is Risen Today," we let the "Alleluias" ring out, and we literally pull out all the stops. But even before the organ gets cranked up, there's the picking out of a favorite Easter dress or colorful Easter tie. If kids are involved there's the wrangling into the dreaded dress shoes. And then there are the daily traditions — the Easter egg hunts, the hot cross buns or Cadbury eggs, the Easter meal with family and friends, the photographs with the kids, preferably before they have an encounter with that chocolate Easter bunny. We love our Easter traditions and, especially coming out of a pandemic when so many of the most familiar things were put on hiatus, they feel particularly meaningful this year.

But that first Easter Day was anything but orderly and traditional. Frankly, the whole thing was a hot mess. It was unexpected, full of surprises, chaotic, and confusing, with nary a jelly bean in sight. In Luke's telling of the story, a group of women head over to the tomb early in the morning with spices to anoint Jesus' body. It's a loving act, a traditional act of burial preparation, left to the women because the men had all fled in grief and terror. Again, *we* have orderly processions with crucifers and vested choirs. *They* had disorderly gaggles of fleeing disciples.

And when the women arrive, they notice that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. This may have been the first clue that things were about to go off the rails. And when they encounter two angels in dazzling white clothes, the fear kicks in. They were terrified! "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" they ask the women. In other words, why are you roaming around this tomb that clearly could not contain Jesus? There's literally nothing to see here, because he has risen!

Of course this doesn't exactly put the women at ease. It's hard to imagine the dazed state they must have been in as they left the tomb to return to the disciples to share this incredible and bizarre and bewildering news of the resurrection. This isn't just disorderly, this pushes directly against the natural order of life and death and things known and unknown. It is the ultimate reversal in the way things are supposed to go. There is nothing traditional about the resurrection.

And so the women, Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James among them, burst into where the disciples are hiding and the words come tumbling out. You can imagine the cacophony of sound as they all start speaking at once, trying to make sense of the scene they witnessed at the empty tomb, along with the at-the-time confusing words they remember Jesus saying about being crucified and rising again on the third day. What they weren't doing was singing "Jesus Christ is Risen Today."

One thing that's as true then as it is today is that many dismiss the women's sharing of this incredible news as an "idle tale." The disciples certainly did. They didn't believe the women's words that came tumbling forth. Maybe it was misogyny, maybe it was hardened hearts, maybe it was just too much for their rational minds to take in. But for Peter, it wasn't until he himself went to the empty tomb that the first glimmer of resurrection hope arose out of the ashes of crucifixion, that new life emerged out of death, that Easter came out of Good Friday. And we know about so-called Doubting Thomas who wouldn't believe until he had literally put his fingers into Jesus' side. We are a rational, disbelieving people.

Even today, some dismiss the Easter story as an idle tale or believe it to be little more than a conspiracy theory. Rationally, it makes no sense, of course. You can't explain the unexplainable; you can't rationalize divine mystery. But then you start to open your eyes and you begin to see glimpses of resurrection all around us. Life being snatched out of the jaws of death; hope held out amid moments of despair; joy emerging out of the depths of pain.

Glimpses of the resurrection surround us every single day, when we open our hearts to the possibilities of new life. This is what it means to live an Easter life: to allow the impossible and the improbable to take root. To hold onto hope, despite all evidence to the contrary. To show love when the world calls for hate.

And that, my friends, is why we can revel in the orderly processions and family traditions of this day, even when things don't go exactly according to plan. And so, whether or not the twins end up in matching outfits, whether or not our lives feel particularly joyful at the moment, whether or not the Easter dinner comes out perfectly, Jesus Christ is indeed risen today. Out of the babble of uncertainty comes the clarity of faith, filling our lives with hope and meaning and new life.

Alleluia and amen.