

Early this morning, a man pulled up to the drive-in window at Maple donuts and ordered two dozen glazed. When asked what kind he wanted his two extras to be, he said he had to go in and look. When he came through the door singing “Are you Lonesome Tonight?”, they realized it was Elvis!

April Fool!

In this era of daily fake news, it is hard to know what is true and what is not.

But one thing I am convinced is true:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Wow!

We’re excited, aren’t we?!

We’ve been waiting for this day

– breaking our Lenten fast,

rejoicing in the celebration of God’s faithfulness

and basking in the incredible sovereignty of God over sin,  
over death, and over evil.

We have looked forward with anticipation for the

- new bright clothes,
- bunnies laying colored eggs,
- chocolate and peeps,
- flowers blooming,
- the lightness of spirit and

- lifting of winter's darkness and depression.

These all remind us of the new life Jesus gives us

- life that cannot be destroyed like the ears on chocolate bunnies.

**We are filled with gladness** at the brightness of lengthening days,  
budding trees and flowers,  
and warmer temperatures.

Christmas is the celebration of Jesus coming into our world as light in  
the darkness

- and Easter is the celebration of **even greater glory**
- the brilliant rays of the Son outshining the daylight
- **the resurrection of Jesus ushering in the new creation.**

There is no brighter light than he

- no greater warmth than his love
- **no longer day than the eternity of his life beyond the grave.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

...

But this is not how the first witnesses to the empty tomb responded.

Jesus was dead.

They watched him die.

They saw him buried and the stone rolled in front of the cave to seal the tomb.

But when the women go to the tomb for the customary anointing of the body, things are not as they expect.

The stone is already rolled away.

Can you imagine the hairs standing up on the back of their necks?

The growing knot in their stomachs because they don't know what to make of it?

When they finally get up the courage to go inside the tomb –

Faces covered because of the stench,

They discover no stench --but a white-robed young man with a message

“Jesus is risen! He is not here!”

And their own eyes confirm that the tomb holds no body. No Jesus.

They are not overjoyed, **They are terrified!**

Beside themselves with trembling anxiety.

So frightened that they fled.

The women were terrified!

What was this, some April Fool's joke?

...

In your mind's eye, imagine making a pile of all the wickedness, tragedies, and evil deeds that have happened in our world.

Add to the pile all the sins we have done and the good we have left undone.

**On Friday, all our piles**

**-- were crammed into Jesus' tomb, sealed off by a stone and buried forever.**

Justice has been rendered.

**But today, that tomb is open and empty. Swept clean –as new.**

Not a trace of death or degradation.

**It is terrifying to have news that defies belief.**

No wonder the women are beside themselves on that first Easter.

A dead man is missing,

a divine messenger says he's alive,

and they could be stoned to death for appearing to tell fake news.

In their shoes, would you greet everyone you met with a cheery Alleluia!  
Christ is risen!? I sure wouldn't.

I would pull my hood up over my head, keep my eyes on the ground,  
and say nothing to nobody.

...

So how have we come to hear and believe this story?

**How do we come to eagerly and joyfully greet one another with this as being good news?**

Because of God's messenger's command – *Go and tell the others that he is risen and is going ahead of you to Galilee.*

And the promise attached to it: *There you will see him.*

**Faith is born when God makes a promise and keeps it.**

The women obey the command to tell the other disciples, and Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee, just as he said.

**The repeated witness to these true events**

**from generation to generation**

**is how we come today to greet each other with joy,**

**Alleluia! Christ is risen!**

..

Now what about tomorrow? A week from now? A month?

**What difference will the resurrection of Jesus make in our lives?**

Will we fall back into terrified silence, or continue to share this wonderful news?

When we think about what it means to be the church, it is tempting to jump right over Good Friday and Easter and go directly to Acts 6 where there are widows and orphans to be cared for.

What I mean is, we often associate church with *doing, serving.*

Certainly, action and activism are important aspects of living out the baptismal life.

**But the first thing** about church is something else entirely.

It is what God's messenger says at the empty tomb.

**Go and tell....**

**To *be* the Church is first and foremost to be tellers of the good news.**

**The Easter experience is to go and tell –**

- Tell of God's surprise in the tomb.
- Tell of the promise that reveals the resurrection as no April Fool's prank.
- Tell the truth that God cannot be predicted or controlled– that God's power is beyond anything we can grasp.
- Tell the distressed that nothing
  - Not guns
  - Not school shootings
  - Not drugs or disease
  - Not bullying or slander
  - Not crazy weather or storms of life
  - Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Jesus – who died and rose from death.
- **Tell the news of Jesus present with us beyond the grave,**
  - beyond the limits of this world,
  - beyond the weight of this life's fading shadows.

**Jesus is risen from the dead – once, and for all people.**

Jesus is risen as the **first of us all to conquer death.**

Jesus is risen to terrify us out of complacency and apathy,  
out of our illusion of holiness and redemption

Jesus is risen to shake us to the core,  
to make our hands and knees tremble  
and to leave us no other recourse but **to bow our faces to the  
ground before the Lord in awe-filled worship and adoration.**

**And once we have grasped that his resurrection is as real as his  
death,**

Jesus the Good Shepherd, gently lifts us up,  
looks upon us with love,  
sets on our feet,  
and sends us out to tell the news.

- Tell the news of Christ's victory to those who tweet doom and gloom.
- Tell the news of death's destruction by the risen Lord to those who stare it down in hospitals, cancer wards, ambulances and firetrucks, burning buildings and war zones.
- Tell the news of our share in Jesus' risen life to those who are still shackled by addiction, persistent sins, compulsions, mental illness, and the despair of poverty.
- Tell the news of the empty tomb to those who grieve.

- Tell someone today that **this world** with all its brokenness and turmoil, its lies and violence, its intractable problems and stubborn prejudices

**Does not have the last word.**

**Jesus is the last word** – and he is the resurrection and the life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen