

¹Early on the first day of the week,
while it was still dark,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

²So 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.”

³Then Peter and the other disciple
set out and went toward the tomb.

⁴The two were running together,
but the other disciple outran Peter
and reached the tomb first.

⁵He bent down to look in
and saw the linen wrappings lying there,
but he did not go in.

⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him,
and went into the tomb.
He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head,
not lying with the linen wrappings
but rolled up in a place by itself.

⁸Then the other disciple,
who reached the tomb first,
also went in,
and he saw and believed;
⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
that he must rise from the dead.

¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹⁹When it was evening on that day,
the first day of the week,

and the doors of the house
where the disciples had met
were locked in fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

²⁰After he said this,
he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples rejoiced
when they saw the Lord.

²¹Jesus said to them again,
“Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me,
so, I send you.”

²²When he had said this,
he breathed on them
and said to them,
“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Here's a little story.

3 men decide to go on a trip together.
It just so happened that the road was slippery,
there was a sharp curve,
a towering cliff and well,
these three men find themselves
standing in front of the pearly gates.

Welcome,
they hear from Saint Peter.
I have one last question for you
before you cross this eternal threshold;
it is a question everyone gets asked
before they step into Heaven.

Is there anything
you'd like to have said about you
at your funeral?
Even as we speak

your loved ones are gathering
to remember you
and according to our records,
he shuffles some papers and says,
it looks like each of you is having
an open casket at your service,
so, if you want something said,
we have a few angels
who can pull some strings
to make that happen.

The first man thinks for a moment
and says, yes, wow,
that's quite an offer.
As a matter of fact,
there is something I'd like said.
I want them to stand over my casket and say,
that I was a respected and successful professional;
a leader in my field.

St. Peter nods and says,
very good,
and he turns to the second man.

The second man says,
I'd like them to stand over my open casket and say,
That I was someone
who loved and served my family,
my congregation and my community.

Alright, good St. Peter replies.

You know, Peter tells them,
those are the two most common answers we get.
Almost everyone says
one or the other of those;
that they want to be remembered
as a great professional
or a great community member.

He turns to the third man and says,
what shall I put down for you?
Profession or community?

Now the third man
had, had more time to think
about his answer.

Neither he replies,
I've got a better idea.

The other two men raise their eyebrows a little
and say, oh really?
You've got something better
than great professional
or great community leader?
We'd like to hear this.
Even St. Peter a little taken aback says,
okay what would you
like to have said at your funeral?

Well, the third man replied,
I'd like them to stand over my open casket and say,
hey-wait a minute!
Look, he's moving!¹

Now that's funny,
because there might be a part of us,
if we are honest,
that wants to cheat death.
To make it a little less harsh,
a little less final.
We almost want to rewrite the rules around death.
We want to overcome it,
defeat death as it were.

¹ Matthew Myer Boulton, <https://www.saltproject.org/podcast-strange-new-world/2021/3/16/understanding-easter-part-five-what-resurrection-is-for>

Well, today,
we rewrote the rules.

We resurrected something
that was dead—the sunrise service.

Hopefully that is my last really bad preacher joke of the morning.

Several years ago, churches in our community
gathered to have a joint sunrise service
on Easter morning at Oakwood Cemetery.

Now, at the time we began that service,
I was teaching the Quest class
(our 8th grade confirmation class)
And I told them about the sunrise service.

Because they were middle schoolers
they were both apprehensive
and wildly curious about our decision
to have the service in a graveyard.

One of them said to me,
“But Heather, what if somebody comes back to life?”
I thought, are you really asking me this?
I said, “that’s why we’re there
-celebrating that Jesus rose from the dead.”

But the kids were persistent;
“But what if somebody else
rises from the dead?!?
What if somebody else
comes back to life?!?” they wanted to know.

For them, it is as if Jesus’s resurrection
made the impossible, possible;
and me, being a rational adult
never even entertained the possibility
of someone rising from the dead.
at our sunrise service.

But what if?

I mean what exactly is resurrection?

No one seems to recognize Jesus
after he's been raised from the dead.
Mary assumes he is the gardener
when she sees him.

Later on in the evening,
the disciples think he's a ghost
until they see the scars on his hands and side.

Resurrection is more than just resuscitation.

It is more than not having a heartbeat
and suddenly having one, again, isn't?
Resurrection is more than
just rewriting the rules.

Remember Lazarus of Bethany,

Mary and Martha's brother?
Jesus raised him from the dead.
Was that resurrection?

We know he was really dead,
but it seems like maybe
there was some cheating of death.
Lazarus didn't defeat death,
Jesus just rewrote the rules
and brought him back to life.

That miracle, the raising of Lazarus
is an impossibility made possible
through the power of Christ
But there's a small clue in the story
that helps us know
this is different than resurrection.

You see,

Lazarus will die again.

When he is called from the tomb,
Jesus tells those who standing there,
to unbind him;

take off,
remove his grave clothes.

It is beautiful to think about
the theological statement
Jesus makes by saying *unbind him,
get those clothes and the stench of death off of him!*
But the fact that he comes out
with grave clothes still on,
tells us that Lazarus is fully human;
he will die again.

He didn't defeat death.
He was dead and now he's alive,
but he will die again.

So again, what is resurrection?

It is Easter,
so, we ought to talk about Jesus.

When Jesus is resurrected,
he leaves his grave clothes behind.
Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved,
race to the tomb after hearing
Mary Magdalene's news.

When they get there
Peter stands in the doorway
and sees the linen wrappings
laying there on the ground.
The death that claimed Jesus' body
is now nothing but scraps laying on the floor.

The veil on Jesus' face has been removed.
Which might remind you
of Moses shining with the glory of God
and having to wear a veil
so, the Israelites could look at him
or the veil that was lifted
at Jesus' transfiguration
and Peter, James and John

are overcome by the glory of God,

The glorification of Jesus was complete on the cross,
Jesus has left his grave clothes behind him,
because he isn't going to need them again.²
Jesus hasn't cheated death;
or just rewritten the rules;
this is different.
This is something new.

What if someone rises from the dead?
What if you are in the garden going to the tomb
and the body is not there?
What if you're in the columbarium (cemetery)
and somebody comes back to life?

What if?
What is resurrection?

The New Testament writers
have several different ways
of teaching us about at resurrection.
Sometimes the scripture highlights
the cross and the sacrifice *more*
and the resurrection becomes
something of an epilogue.

Other accounts center in on the resurrection
as the pinnacle
and the cross as something
that just makes the resurrection possible.
But in John's gospel,
John who we've been with
over these last several weeks
in our sermon series...
you know what John highlights?

Neither of these approaches.

² Francis Taylor Gench, Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John, (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2007) pg. 130

John opts for an another way
of talking Jesus' death and resurrection.
He uses a story told in 3 parts
—where the cross is one part,
the resurrection is the second part
and third part...
well, the first two
lead up to the third.
And because it is John,
there isn't an explanation
for *what resurrection is*.
John is more interested in telling us
what the resurrection is for.³

When the time comes
the authorities arrest Jesus in the garden.
He is taken to the religious leaders
and then he debates with Pilate,
he isn't silent before his accusers
and Jesus decides on the cross,
that ***it is finished*** and willing gives up his spirit.
The trail and crucifixion are act 1,
that's John's first part of the story.

Act 2 consists of
the resurrection appearances
on the morning and the evening
on the first day of the week.
The first appearance of the resurrected Christ
belongs to Mary Magdalene.
Overcome with grief,
Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener,
only recognizing him
when he calls her by name.

Later in that same day,
Jesus appears to the disciples,

³ Matthew Myer Boulton, <https://www.saltproject.org/podcast-strange-new-world/2021/3/16/understanding-easter-part-five-what-resurrection-is-for>

men and women,
 who have locked themselves inside
 from the outside world.
Jesus stands among them,
 and shows them the scars
 from the cross
 before they believe
 he is who he has always claimed to be.

These resurrection appearances
 are act 2, John's second story part.

Now what more could there be?
 Yes, there's ole Thomas the doubter;
 there's the Great Commission;
 the walk to Emmaus;
 there's a fish fry breakfast on the beach
 ...you know what, Whit?
That sounds like a good series for Vespers
 ...Sorry, that's another pastor joke
because we'd already
decided that last week.

We've covered the cross and the resurrection,
 so, what else is John saying
 is important here?

The third part of John's telling
 of the mystery of resurrection
 —well, it could be another little story.

Back in chapter 12 of this gospel
 the very last public thing Jesus says is this,

 "The hour has come
 for the Son of Man to be glorified.
 Very truly I tell you,
 unless a grain of wheat
 falls into the earth and dies,
 it remains just a single grain;

but if it dies,
it bears much fruit." (12:23-24)

When Jesus finds his followers
behind the fear-filled locked doors of the house,
he greets them with,
"Peace be with you."
Now I hope had those disciples
been Presbyterians they would have answered, ...

Jesus shows them his scars and then
...This is act three...
the culmination
of the crucifixion and resurrection,

"Jesus said to them again,
Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me,
so, I send you.
When he said this,
he breathed on them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit."

This is what resurrection is for.
It is for this community
that will love each other
as Christ has loved them.
This is what resurrection is for;
a new family brought together by faith
not just kinship and last names;
a new movement of God's people
that will flourish
in the abiding presence of Christ,
by receiving the Holy Spirit.

This is what resurrection is for;
these men and women
who are behind locked doors,
are boldly sent out

to carry out the mission of God's own Son,
to do the very things Jesus did.

What is resurrection for?

It is for us—

for us to embody the mission of Jesus,
who was sent from the Father,
who was with God in the beginning
and even now, is with God.

We are the are to carry out

this decidedly
incarnational understanding of mission;
[We become the very body and lifeblood
of Christ himself in the world.]
where the life of love
becomes the trademark and credential
of whom we are.⁴

Acts 1, 2 and 3.

A story in three parts.

“For John
resurrection is a signpost
that points beyond itself
to the new beloved community
of love and justice,
kindness and humility
—or as Jesus puts it in his last teaching,
a single grain that dies,
and then grows
and bears much fruit.”⁵

What if somebody rises from the dead
at the sunrise service, Heather?

Well, here's the thing.

⁴ Francis Taylor Gench, Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John, (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2007) pg. 136

⁵ Matthew Myer Boulton, <https://www.saltproject.org/podcast-strange-new-world/2021/3/16/understanding-easter-part-five-what-resurrection-is-for>

Standing here, with all of you,
among the graves,
all I see is life,
abundant life,
overflowing life,
ongoing—can I call it eternal life?
Life and light that have come
and no darkness, sin, death, nothing,
not one thing has ever vanquished it.

What if someone rises from the dead?
That's what resurrection is for.

Resurrection is a mystery;
it makes possible
what is believed to be impossible;
resurrection is a mystery
designed to remain open;
impervious to certainties⁶,

I can't exactly tell you what resurrection is,
but I can tell you
what that resurrection is for...
it is for the flourishing of life,
it is for women and men
who are sent out
to do the things Jesus himself did;
it was for
a seed that dies,
and is buried
and then grows
and bears so. much. fruit.

Amen.

⁶ ibid