

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
April 5, 2026- Easter Sunday  
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118; Colossians 3:1-4; **John 20:1-18**

**“For as yet they did not understand...” †**  
*Christos Anesti! Alethos Anesti!*

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Sometimes ‘real life’ seems incomprehensible, often so hard to understand! Consider the stories running constantly in the media of turmoil and violence around the world, the reports of war and bombings, and death— I wonder if we are on the brink of destruction and encountering the so-called ‘end times,’ or just the victims of crazy people temporarily in power. Sometimes ‘real life,’ with drastic changes in human society, the massive fluctuation in the cost of living and procuring food, and the constant uncertainty of our personal safety seems unbelievable, like I’m living in a fantasy. Perhaps our current story line is not much different the fantastic stories in the Scriptures of Jesus’ resurrection. Stories that require great faith to understand, particularly during times of fear and doubt. This week I found the words from John’s Gospel helpful: “For as yet they did not understand.”

Some stories are just too weird. I’m going to share *again*, one such story that took place many years ago, just after I was ordained. I found myself leading Easter services alone for the first time at Trinity Church in Torrington. It happened to be for the Children’s service (meant for infants-in-arms, toddlers, and preschoolers), and I asked the kids what Easter was all about. ‘What do we celebrate at Easter?’ And one precocious boy jumped up and said: “Easter is when the rock over the tomb was rolled away, and Jesus was freed!” ...☺  
“You see,” he continued, “the Easter Bunny rolled away the stone and let the resurrected Jesus out!” My response was cautious: “Remember the Gospel stories, they say it might have been angels, or a man in dazzling white at the tomb...” “Nope,” he insisted, “It was the Easter Bunny, you see they just didn’t recognize him... They didn’t know him, because they hadn’t found any of the eggs yet!” As I stood there in front of him, with several parents smirking at me, I must have looked helpless, because he quickly added, “Everyone knows that the Easter egg hunt comes *after* we see Jesus in Church! They had to see Jesus, *then* go find the eggs. Seriously Father, haven’t you ever done this before?”

A fantastic story, and almost theologically sound, but still an incredible tale! Not unlike the one the first disciples heard. Depending upon which Gospel version you choose, there may have been a young man, or two dazzling men or angels. Regardless, there was certainly something incredible about the discovery that first Easter morning. Some stories are just too weird to take seriously, and how we receive them depends upon the witnesses, upon the credibility of the ones who are telling it.

In Luke’s version, we are told, ‘These words seemed to them an idle tale.’ The Greek word here for ‘idle,’ is *le’ros* (nonsense), and it usually refers to a person who is suffering from delirium. The disciples thought the storytellers were crazy. Grief and fear can do that; they can bring doubt to the forefront, even though faith once seemed so strong. Consider all the Gospel

accounts of the resurrection. They vary in many ways, yet they all agree that the *first* people to whom the risen Jesus revealed himself were *women*. That's remarkable because at the time these events took place, women were not considered reliable witnesses. No offense to women today, but at the time of Jesus, women were not considered equals of men, they were property. By Jewish law, woman had very few rights, no legal standing, they were not ritually clean, they were deemed unworthy... and not reliable witnesses.

Yet, Jesus chose to reveal himself first to *women* after he was risen, why? Perhaps because they cared about and were loyal to Jesus. They went to the tomb and weren't afraid to let anyone see them do it! We can't say that about the men. These women cared for Jesus when he was alive & also after he had died. They knew him and they loved him.

The story we heard today from John's Gospel is very different from that in the other Synoptic Gospels. Notice that Mary Magdalene is not with other women, but all alone in her grief. She is going to sit by Jesus' grave early before the sunrise, to weep and mourn. When she discovers what she assumes to be the work of grave robbers (very common in that day), she runs to seek consolation from the disciples. But when they return to discover the empty tomb, the men are silent, and we're told that "they did not understand" and "returned to their homes." They returned to relative safety, and left Mary alone again.

As I read over this passage this week, I could not help but consider how these closest disciples of Jesus were scattered in fear, isolated in their own homes. I could not help but feel the sadness and the loneliness Mary must have felt on that day... the uncertainty. Feelings vividly experienced by all of us during the past few months of world conflict and economic upheaval. There is so much to be uncertain about. And though the disciples were warned earlier in this same Gospel, "you will have pain, but it will turn into joy," yet in their grief, "they did not understand."

Then comes a fantastic twist. The angels and the Risen Jesus appear, and Mary sees Jesus, though she does not recognize him. Perhaps her own fear and grief get in the way at first. Once she understands who it is, she reaches to "hold onto him." And she's told not to, that things are different: 'Do not cling to what was, to what used to be...' I am changed; everything is changed! This remarkable story, the story of the resurrection, is about *change and transformation*, out of human brokenness comes human fulfillment! He who was dead is alive again! And yet, Jesus is not the same as he was... and neither are we!

We know, through faith, that Jesus continues to reveal himself to us today in ways that are just as fantastic and crazy. I wonder how Christ is revealing himself today...

Is he present in the innocent lives which have been turned asunder by the war in the Middle East— in Jerusalem, Iran, Palestine, and Lebanon? What about in those who continue to suffer from the forgotten conflicts in Ukraine and Africa? And in those countless victims of gun violence throughout our own nation? Does he come in the form of those who are suffering from illness and dying of cancer? Is revealing himself in the first responders that continue to work in our communities despite their decreasing numbers? Is he with those who've lost their homes and livelihood from physical events (like fire and storm) or through financial hardship? Is he among the homeless, the outcast, those on the edge of our societies?

**Yes**, he is... and he's also present with *anyone* who feels lonely and forgotten. In those who have lost loved ones and those who find themselves unemployed. He is present with the many children and their parents struggling to return to a somewhat normal life again after the era of COVID. He is present, now! In all our lives. In all those who share his love. Despite what may seem to be some of the worst events in our life, Christ always brings something good.

Yes, some stories are just too weird, too fantastic, to take seriously... but not *this* story! And *today* we witness this. Today we witness the love of Christ and his real presence with us as we gather this morning and share Eucharist. It's not easy to explain, we just know and feel it deep inside. We, all of us, are the witnesses to Easter, called to share this beautiful, incredible, unbelievable story, and it's not easy to explain why. We only know that we must witness to the truth that out of suffering, comes peace... out of crucifixion, comes glory... out of death, comes new life!

Allow this Easter to be one that is unforgettable. Recognize *how different we are* today from last year. And 'set your minds on the things that are above' (Col 3). No matter how difficult life in the world may be or how hard it may become, our God is able to transform it into good. God's is glorified in many ways, even ways that may appear to us to be hopeless and wrong, for God's love transcends everything! Proclaim, in the words of the Psalmist, "I shall not die, but I shall live" (Psalm 118.17). I shall live in Christ and NOTHING—no power in heaven or on earth—can ever change that!

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! †**