

## **Leaving the Tomb**

Easter on Lockdown – John chapter 20

Never before has my sense of Easter been so altered as it has been this year. Gone are all the usual hints that this day brings – worship with the throng of your faith family, a full sanctuary, brass and timpani, organ, the shouting of alleluias by the faithful. Gone are the physical, tangible reminders that this day means everything to the faithful on earth – Holy Communion, the sharing of the peace, family gatherings, meals, and fellowship. Gone are the ways we have made Easter what we have made it. It can't feel like Easter without those things, can it?

It's as if like Mary Magdelene, we too stoop looking in the tomb, expecting to still see Jesus there. It can't be Easter. We are trapped at home. It can't be Easter. Our loved ones die of a vicious virus. It can't be Easter, because it feels like the altar of Good Friday is still stripped bare.

**Which means that Easter, the resurrection of our Lord has to be more than what we have made it to be to feel like Easter.**

Which is why the empty tomb is ultimately about us. You see the old news about Easter is that it is about resurrection. As Christ followers, we all know that Easter is about resurrection. Yet, the new news about Easter may not be just about the Resurrection of Jesus. The new news is that Easter is about our own Resurrection. I just want to say this today especially because it's easy to miss when we are sheltering at home, when we miss our loved ones, when we cannot even visit each other when we are in need or ill, even in some cases, when we are dying.

We often miss that the empty tomb is about us because Jesus isn't in the tomb anymore, but we are, and we have the DNA and

the fragility to show it, as the fear around us mounts, as the anxiety increases, as the loneliness compounds. And, so often, we ourselves are not willing to leave that tomb. Now, I'm not talking about our physical tombs, where we are ultimately buried, although those tombs aren't empty yet either. No, it's the tomb we refuse to leave in life, it's a metaphorical tomb, the tombs we so understandable and easily place ourselves in without the help of God to get us out.

It's in the tomb that we discover things about ourselves. In that tomb, we wrestle about all our problems. In the tomb, we lack faith. In the tomb, we succumb to our desire to allow the world to dictate what we love, believe, and follow instead of Christ. In the tomb, we remain unchanged by the resurrection.

The same happened to the first woman who went to proclaim the Gospel message to the disciples. That woman, Mary Magdelene, claimed that they have taken my Lord away. Peter and the other disciple didn't know what to make of it. And, the disciples couldn't foresee the empty tomb either just as Mary could not. Even stumbling upon Jesus himself, she was still there in her own tomb of doubt, grief, and unbelief.

You see the empty tomb isn't just about Jesus and his changing everything. The empty tomb is also about us, and whether we are able to change our lives for the sake of new life, or remain in fear and grief.

But, the tomb will not be covered. The stone cannot bar the way; for Christ's victory over death is the beginning for us, and today it is time to come out of the tomb together. For, today and every day we are also raised into, a new life of faith, simply because Christ was raised for our sakes. Each day is a new life in Christ. Godly surprises and miracles are always happening even now.

For each of us, it will be different. There are many things that happen to us that help us to remain in the tomb. Some of you have lost your jobs. Some of you have underlying illnesses that put you at risk. Some of you are fearful as you do your essential work. Some of you are dying. Some of you are fortunate, able to be with loved ones at home. Some of you are students who will graduate without the normal acknowledgements or you miss your friends. And we will all have a changed life because of this pandemic.

**What is it that keeps you in the tomb, unable to be raised to new life in faith? Christ's tomb is empty for you.**

Phillip, a ten-year old boy, was one of those kids that didn't fit in with his peers. For this reason, even in his Sunday school class, he wasn't fully accepted. The Sunday before Easter, the teacher came up with a creative plan for the kids.

Giving each of the kids a plastic egg, they were assigned the task to go outside the church building and find a symbol of new life, put it in the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. When all the children had returned they took turns opening their eggs and showing their symbol of new life.

The first child opened her egg and displayed a flower. The children "oohed" and "aahed." Another child opened his egg and there was a colorful caterpillar. More "oohs" and "aahs." When it came to Phillip, he opened his egg and it was empty. There was nothing inside. One of the kids said, "That's not fair! That's stupid. Phillip didn't do it right!" The kids exclaimed in chorus: "You don't ever do things right, Phillip. There's nothing there." "I did so do it right" Phillip exclaimed. It's empty! The tomb is empty! Isn't that's how it's supposed to be?"

**The tomb is empty and that is how it's supposed to be.**  
Christ being raised from death to new life IS about our being raised from death to new life, not only when we physically die, but now, as we are called to new life in our daily living, in our spiritual calling, in our relationships with others. The Resurrection starts NOW.

**Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**