

“Easter, From Many Angles”

Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18; Mark 16:1-8 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – April 5, 2026

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that the light of new life might
refract in every direction, bringing joy and hope to all. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

I wanted us to read all four Easter stories today because sometimes it’s really important to remind ourselves that the world is never bound by just one narrative. In our country, we have supposedly committed ourselves to multiple stories, no one person’s heritage or culture dictating how another person should live. We’re living through times when it’s vital to remember that. Even more importantly, our faith – as evidenced by what we just heard – invites in and celebrates that Christ arrives in our lives in a multitude of ways. Christ’s presence and love and hope are constantly multiplying, not like a virus replicating mostly identical copies of itself, but like jazz, where everyone gets to improvise their own interpretation of the melody.

I want us to act this out today, in conversation, rather than simply me talking and you listening like we usually do. But not just by talking to each other. I have a little art project for us to do, which we’ll get started first. You hopefully noticed there is a strip of cloth in your bulletin. I’m going to pass around these markers; you’ll have to share, as there definitely aren’t enough for everyone. The idea is for each person to write a Easter message on your strip of cloth, in your own handwriting. Any variation

of “Christ is risen! Hallelujah!” is good, and if you prefer to word that differently, go for it! There are at least four different spellings of Hallelujah in our hymnal, so pick whichever one you like or make up a new one!

Those of you on Zoom, I invite you to put what you’d like written on your strip of cloth into the chat box, and we’ll have somebody here put it on one for you.

After worship, we’re going to take these ribbons over and tie them onto the fence in the new pollinator garden, in the shape of a cross. We probably won’t leave them there forever, but at least for a few weeks, as a way of incorporating the Easter season into the garden’s growth.

So your handwriting is one way to share your perspective on Easter. But let’s talk about what these stories are saying to us this morning. First of all, I’m wondering if there was anything you noticed as we heard them today that you’d forgotten about or never realized was part of the Easter story? (*I always like to be reminded that Matthew includes earthquakes.*)

What are the similarities that you noticed between the stories? What are some of the differences in those similarities? (*women, how the disciples responded, hesitation to believe, the way the angels are described...*)

Does anyone have a favorite part of one or more of these stories? (“*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*”)

How did these stories land differently for you because we read all of them together? Was it confusing? Was it more interesting?

One of the beautiful things about having four gospels, instead of one harmonized mash-up is that different parts of the different versions can speak to us at different points in our lives. Mark's Easter story is so short and ends so abruptly, even the early compilers of the gospel weren't satisfied with it. You can see the "alternate" endings that have possibly been added on a little later. But I think it's important to consider what it can tell us to have the story end right there at verse 8. There are times when something good arriving in our life isn't immediately obvious as something good. There are times when an unexpected change just leaves us with terror and amazement, unable to really talk about what's happening to anyone at all. To have that experience of being so overwhelmed we can't even talk about reflected back to us in an Easter story makes even our confusion and need to process a holy part of the human experience. Sometimes when something big happens, an awareness that we're going to be living a different life from now on slowly, ever so slowly washes over us, and it can take some time to adjust to that and learn what it means. That is also part of being in relationship with the living God.

Some of us may still have a little hesitation about claiming our own Easter story, after lifetimes of being taught the Easter stories happened “back then.” It might help to just let yourself ask questions. Sometimes the best way to discover the Easter story that’s buried within our souls is to ask the question “What if?” I ran across a beautiful poem from Marvin K. White, Minister of Celebration at Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, that I want to share with you, in hopes that it can open us up even wider to the possibilities God’s Easter story is birthing within us.

Rev. White writes:

What if God was at work and got a call from Jesus who was crying and scared saying “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour? Father, glorify Your name.”

What if God didn’t know what was going on and whispered into the phone outside of the earshot of the supervisor, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”?

What if God was at work and got another call from one of Jesus’ friends who confirmed that Jesus was in trouble?

What if Jesus’ friend said some dudes were planning on setting him up, jumping him, and killing him?

What if God had just gotten this over time working graveyard and couldn’t afford another write up for talking on the phone on the job?

What if God couldn’t get off work because God had used up all of God’s sick leave from all them other times God got this call?

What if God comforted God’s self hoping that God taught Jesus right?

What if God was like a lot of mothers in Oakland, Chicago and Detroit?

What if God could hear Jesus crying for God and God couldn’t do anything?

What if God’s son was killed?

And what if God only had God's self to comfort God?

What if God knows who witnessed his son's murder and they knew God knew they saw and they still didn't come forward?

What if God knows who did it and didn't press charges?

What if God felt responsible?

What if God remembers saying "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." but also remembers all of the time that God wasn't able to go to back to school night, hear him teach at temple, made it home for dinner or heal lepers?

What if God couldn't bring God's self to identify the body and had Mary do it?

What if God didn't have the money to have the body embalmed and had to depend on women like my mama and your mama and Lovetta to take care of it?

What if God heard the body was missing?

What if God couldn't afford a plot at Rolling Hills or Arlington?

What if God couldn't sleep for 40 days because people on the news say they saw Jesus in Jerusalem with his disciples and Paul was on the news saying he was on his way to Damascus and Jesus tried to blind him and Cleopas said he was on his way to Emmaus and saw Jesus?

What if God didn't know what to believe?

What if God was inconsolable and besides God's self?

What if God was rocking God's self crying, "Katrina, Katrina, Katrina, Katrina?"

What if it was a day like today and God heard something through God's grief and God looked up and there to God's surprise was God's son Jesus?

What if God can be surprised?

What if God didn't know these tears God was crying because God had never had a son go through hell just to come home?

What if God cried harder when Jesus came home than when he left home?

What if God leapt from creation and towards Jesus and Jesus leapt from death towards God and they collapsed into each other's arms like they were both running from somebody?

And what if that hug is what all of creation feels like when we see God seeing us?
What if God's children back in God's arms is what we're celebrating this Resurrection Sunday?
What if God doesn't know so when God sees you its like the first time God is holding Gods child?
What if God does not want to rehearse that response?
What if God becomes God every time one of us makes it home?
What if we all make it home?
What if the God of the outpouring is now the God of the inflowing, leaping up and opening God's self to receive us like a child coming home after a report to the contrary?
What if God gets to pray and we God's answer every time?
What if...
What if...
What if...

It's important that our scriptures have four separate gospels. I would go so far as to say that reality ought to be formative for Christian faith. Rather than one party-line we all must adhere to, we are taught from the very beginning that following Jesus involves a multiplicity of voices, a plethora of perspectives, a choir of testimonies. Your voice in that choir makes a difference, even if you're still figuring out your part. And now, as we proclaim the good news together one more time, let us listen for all the different pitches and tones joining together: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah! And Amen.