

**EASTER SERVICE**  
**A Sermon On Luke 24:1 – 12**  
**Easter Sunday**  
**April 4, 2010**  
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*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”*

As the world rolls toward new days,  
crushes winters into pasts,  
gales away the darkening clouds,  
and calls for those asleep to wake  
I will go softly to the house of May.

Years ago, just before Easter, we were with friends sitting in a fancy restaurant ready to put the gift certificate I received at my birthday party to good use. This was to be a night away from concerns of the church. A night for fun. A night for us. What better place to escape the deeply theological than at a fine restaurant where the concern runs toward the choice of blue cheese or ranch, rare or medium well? But there would be no escape. The voice of God waited in our booth speaking from the printing on a small tent card resting upon the table and not to be consumed. The deep indigo voice of God declared, **“Easter Service begins at 11:00. Reservations recommended.”**

I know it sounds silly, but it took us all a moment to appreciate the mundane and utterly secular surface intent of the message. In that moment our minds tried to imagine a full house of fine dining looking up from the lazy-Susan salad server to declare as one voice, “Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.” It was a moment to treasure – a coming together of the sacred and the secular, the profound and the perverse, the transforming and the trivial. **“Easter Service begins at 11:00. Reservations recommended.”**

And with each life emerging from the soil,  
yellow-green and fragile bodied things  
growing into sturdy dark-hued browns,  
you will find me stretching with the day  
and walking 'round this house of May.

In Christian sanctuaries around this world on this particular morning people are gathered to recite the ancient creeds, hear the Easter story again and declare with one voice, “Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.” For many it is an act of devotion – a deep spiritual river running from the heart of the devoted to God. For others it is an exercise of spring – a little deeper than putting away the snow shovel and planting the geraniums, but pleasant and satisfying. For some the notion of Easter is an intellectual embarrassment – a preposterous story unacceptable to educated minds accustomed to scientific method. All three exist within the sound of my voice. On this particular Easter morning we are no different than the millions of Christians and seekers gathered in thousands of sanctuaries around the world. We are no different than the ancient ones who heard but did not comprehend. Beneath the outer surface of the devoted, the satisfied and the skeptical lies the question; “did it happen?”

That particular question no longer interests me. It once did, but it holds no fascination for me now. In its place I ask a different question. Instead of “Did it happen?” I am much more interested in “What does it mean?” What is the good of Easter if it gives no direction to our lives? Sometimes I think we like to argue over the “Did it happen?” question precisely because it places no demands upon us. We can trivialize the true power of the story by keeping it distant and academic. But the incarnation of God is not academic, something to be thought about, as much as it is something to be experienced and in the experience of it be transformed by it.

Easter tells us that God will not be bound by the powers of this world. Easter tells us that God will reach through the darkest of days to wrench hope from despair. Easter tells us that in giving ourselves to God's purpose rather than our own purpose, just as Jesus did, even death cannot hold us. Easter announces that the risen Christ is out there ahead of us and begs us to wonder why we are still seeking the living among the dead. It is an angel's way of saying, "What are you waiting for? Quit tending to what was and get busy preparing for that which is yet to come." *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."* The voice of God from a tent card in a fancy restaurant declares **"Easter Service begins at 11:00."** Will it? Or will we once again leave our Alleluias at the door of the church and continue trying to find Jesus among the remains of what used to be. Maybe this year someone will march out of here and throw off the shackles of addiction. Alleluia. Maybe someone will go to the phone tomorrow and joyfully present themselves and all of their retired talent to Volunteers in Mission. Alleluia. Maybe this year each of us will gladly take a step closer to giving a tithe of our income and we will move closer to making generosity an act of discipleship rather than an act of desperation. Alleluia. Maybe this time we will leave here and race to catch up with the risen Christ who is already out there ahead of us with the children, with the youth, counseling the troubled, feeding the hungry. Christ the Lord is risen today. Alleluia. The celebration is now but **"Easter Service begins at 11:00."**

I'll gather bits of God from drips  
of water off the leafy fonts,  
watch for ripples spreading from  
my soggy steps along the way,  
and hope to see you in this house of May.

My prayer for this Easter is not that the service will go well or that the choir will move us with song or that the day will be gloriously beautiful. Those things are a near certainty. I pray that Easter will touch us and change us – send us off in a new direction. I pray that individually and as a church we will know the meaning of coming to a tomb and being redirected out to Galilee. I pray that hope replaces despair in our hearts – that purpose replaces habit – that joy pushes out grumpiness. Argue if you must about “Did it happen?” It is a convenient way to avoid the impact of the story.

So when the world rolls toward new days,  
and crushes winters into pasts,  
remember how we walked along,  
on these paths, these green-grown ways,  
together with God in this house of May.

The risen Christ is not to be found while tending to the things that used to be. Why do we always seek the living among the dead? He is not there. He is out there ahead of us. In this hour let us celebrate and sing our alleluias. Then roll up our sleeves and get to work. The voice of God spoke to me through a tent card on the table. God said, **“Easter Service begins at 11:00. Reservations recommended.” THANKS BE TO GOD**

## The Resurrection of Jesus

### Luke 24

<sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.