

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 17, 2022 – RESURRECTION SUNDAY/EASTER DAY, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*The One that Got Out*”

Acts 10:34-43	(Jesus, the Risen Christ, will return as judge of the living and the dead)
Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24	(On this day the Lord has acted, and we will rejoice in it!)
1 Corinthians 15:19-26	(Life is meaningless and we remain in our sins if Christ is not raised)
St. John 20:1-18	(Mary Magdalene encounters the Risen Christ at the empty tomb)

“*I am the resurrection and the life.* Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” So said Jesus to Martha of Bethany, after she has just confronted Him with news of her brother Lazarus’ death. (John 11:25a).

Two thousand years later, do we believe this? Martha had replied, even in the midst of her sorrow and grief, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (v. 27b).

That first Easter morning, Jesus’ disciples were also in the midst of sorrow and grief, mourning the death of their friend, teacher, mentor, and Lord. But something strange and terrible had happened. His body was missing! In a panic, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, all raced to the empty tomb, where they went in and saw Jesus’ grave clothes on the vacant slab.

What were they to think? Today’s gospel account is authored by St. John, who, speaking of himself, records: “the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that [Jesus] must rise from the dead.”

Hmm. Even though John and the others neither understood the biblical prophecies nor what Jesus had repeatedly told them about His passion, death, and resurrection, John believes that Christ is risen when he witnesses the empty tomb.

Bravo! St. John, because in his account of the resurrection, the disciples don’t have the advantage of an announcement, as they do in Mark’s account, where an angel tells three of the women, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him” (Mark 16:5b-6 NKJV). Still, since no one had ever been raised from the dead and walked out of a grave alive, this was no doubt still confusing to Jesus’ followers.

Five-year-old Brian had a pivotal verse—Luke 24:6—to recite in an Easter program: “He is not here, he is risen.” Unfortunately, he couldn’t remember what to say, and the director had to quietly remind him of his line. Brian then confidently grabbed the microphone and triumphantly shouted, “He’s not here; He’s in prison!”¹

A cute and funny mistake ... but little Brian could not have known that in 1 Peter 3 (19-20a), we read that Christ “was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey.” There has been a longstanding interpretation of Scripture—and we even say this in the Apostles’ Creed—that because Jesus paid for our sins on the Cross, he descended into hell. Why? To continue paying for our sins, or was it to preach the Gospel one last time to those imprisoned by the devil?

What actually happened isn’t something we can ever know as fact. But we can take from this enigmatic Scripture that Jesus is willing to go wherever it’s necessary to bring the good news of salvation and life eternal—and that means, anywhere in our world and our lives. So, even with all the dreadful things happening around the globe, we can be certain that Christ is present despite the evil, because by His Resurrection, He has conquered sin, death, and hell. As both Martha of Bethany and St. John the Apostle did, we simply need to *believe!*

In the second part of today's gospel lesson, after St. John says "the disciples returned to their homes"—hey, nothing to see here—Mary of Magdala stays at Jesus' tomb weeping. Two angels ask her why she's crying. Well, *duh!* Unlike in Mark's account, they don't bother to tell her Christ is risen. But then, the risen Lord Himself comes to her.

Never having seen a person raised from the dead, it's understandable that Mary doesn't recognize Jesus—until He speaks her name, in that familiar and much-loved voice she knows so well. Apparently, she wants to grab onto Jesus to make sure it's Him, give Him a big ol' hug, because Jesus' next comment is, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." Instead, go tell the rest of my disciples about this miracle you are witnessing.

What does Mary run back and exclaim? "Someone has stolen His body?" "The Lord is risen"? No. She proclaims with abundant joy and magnificent faith: "*I have seen the Lord!*"

So, we've had St. John who believed Christ was risen just from seeing the empty tomb. Now Mary believes because she has seen the Lord! Next Sunday, we'll talk about St. Thomas, who saw the risen Jesus in person and still didn't believe. Hm. Tough crowd. Are *we* any different? What does it take for *us* to believe that Christ is truly risen, that He ever lives and is always with us, and that some day He will return to take us with Him to heaven.

I'm not sure we can fully believe in the resurrection of Christ unless we have *experienced* His presence and power, His peace and purpose, in our own lives. Mary's encounter with Jesus was very personal, one-on-one. He met her where she was, and she took from that what she needed. Jesus does the same with each of us.

When we read Scripture and the stories of Jesus come alive for us; when we pray in His Name and those prayers are answered; when we partake of the Eucharist and mystically know that we are receiving Christ; and in many other ways, the risen Christ is with us, loving us, guiding us, healing us, and praying for us. This is the great good news of Easter!

A man and his six-year-old daughter were driving past a cemetery. When they saw a large pile of dirt next to a freshly dug grave, the little girl cried, "Look, Dad, one got out!" Next time you drive past a cemetery—or look out on ours here at St. John's—think of the One Whom the grave could not hold—no matter what.²

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

¹ Source: [Mature Living](#), April 2011.

² Adapt. source unknown, [Ministry127](https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/one-got-out) <<https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/one-got-out>> Used with permission.