

Sermon for Easter Sunday - April 17, 2022  
Luke 24:1-12

**Prayer:** May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Holly, has a four-year old daughter, Maggie. As Easter approached Holly struggled to get through to four-year old Maggie the meaning of Easter. It went something like this:

"Mommy, will the Easter bunny bring me purple jelly beans?"

*I am sure the bunny will bring you jelly beans, Maggie. But, remember, Easter isn't about the bunny. It's about Jesus.*

"But will they be purple?"

*Yes, honey, I am sure there will be some purple ones in there. Honey, the important thing about Easter isn't the bunny. Easter is about how much Jesus loves you and me and the whole world.*

"Mommy, HOW MANY purple jelly beans will the Easter Bunny bring me?"  
*Maggie, I think the bunny will probably bring plenty of purple jellybeans. Do you know how much Jesus loves you?*

"Mommy..."

*Yes Maggie?*

"Will the bunny bring me chocolate eggs too?"

You see, for a four-year old, Easter bunnies, purple jelly beans and chocolate eggs are just way more interesting than JESUS, and they are enough to make Easter fun. And fun is, for a four old, enough!

Although Easter hasn't gotten to the point of having as many consumer and cultural distractions as Christmas, sometimes it's the same way for adults; lilies and new clothes and family visits and Easter dinner preparations consume our attention.

Showing up at worship on Easter Sunday for **some** of us, is just part of the routine, and we come expecting little more than candy-coated clichés. But, my guess, is that, unless you're four, you're looking for something beyond candy-coated clichés added to the assortment of jellybeans we consume. I have to believe that is why so many of us come to worship on this day. We want to know something of what Holly was trying to get through to Maggie.

Holly knows that Maggie won't always be four, and sooner or later-- Maggie, and all of God's children, indeed, all of us, need more. For we all, if we haven't already, will encounter the dark night of heart wrenching grief, devastating disappointment or smothering guilt, and when we do, we will need MORE than bunnies and jelly beans.

I wonder when that need for **more** will hit Maggie.

-Will it be when she's bullied at school and feels like there's no one to turn to?

-Will it be when she's betrayed by a so-called "best friend" or has her heart broken by the person around whom she's built her whole life?

-Or perhaps one day she'll look in the mirror and admit to herself that she has been the bully or the betrayer or the heartbreaker and knowing this she can never undo the damage she's done and it will make it hard to keep looking at that face staring back at her.

-Maybe it will be the day she's told by the doctor it's not just a cold after all.

-Maybe she will be spoon-feeding her frail beloved father, who once fed her and whose strong body once gave her piggyback rides, and a sense of powerlessness will overtake her.

-Or will it be the day when her life's work ends with a pink slip and a deadline for cleaning out her office?

-Or will it be in the middle of a night of a family crisis when she's looking into the desperate eyes of her own child and realizing she doesn't really know him and worse yet--he doesn't want her to?

-Maybe it will be when she encounters some expression of racism or classism or some other ism and the human capacity for cruelty will astonish and paralyze her and she will need more than bunnies and jellybeans.

-You and I know, perhaps all too well, those days happen

And that's when we really need to know what Easter is all about.

That might have been how Mary Magdalene felt that first Easter morning. It was just so dark outside; violence and fear hung like a dark cloud over her once adventurous life of following Jesus and learning from this meek but authoritative teacher around whom she had reoriented all of her days. The light that had once shone on her had been extinguished on a Roman cross. Not only was it dark in the world that morning, but it was dark in her soul. Where there had once been a glimmer of hope, there was now only despair.

And while it was dark, she came to the tomb with the other women. There in the darkness of her life, she was surprised by the Light of Easter and her story has become the Christian story. It is **THE STORY WE** remember and **CELEBRATE TOGETHER IN WORSHIP TODAY**. It is the **SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT** reason we **EVER GET TOGETHER** any

Sunday of the year - or any day of the week. It is the heartbeat of Christian community. It is the HOPE to which we cling and the PROMISE upon which we stand. It is the very essence of Christian faith. It is more than cliché.

SO WHAT IS IT ABOUT?//

In the final analysis, IT'S ABOUT LIFE!

You see, Mary came to the tomb thinking that DEATH was the end for Jesus. She goes in the dark, early morning to prepare Jesus' body for burial. She is resigned to the finality of death. She is grieving. At first, she does not even recognize NEW LIFE right when it is in front of her. But when the two, in dazzling clothes speak, she knows.

Maybe you can relate to Mary? Maybe on this Easter MORNING you are struggling to find a purpose, a reason to hope. Perhaps the forces of death are consuming you, maybe you have lost a loved one or friend. Perhaps the death that pervades our culture, Covid deaths, and other tragic deaths that come as a result of war and terrorism or random acts of violence, perhaps it is the death of a life-sustaining relationship or business. Maybe even one or more of these things has convinced you that not much makes sense in this life and although you are breathing and your heart is beating, it is also breaking. Perhaps you have come to church today, not looking for life but expecting to find more of the same...Easter bunnies and jelly beans...some candy-coated clichés that do not touch the real questions of your life or bring comfort to your deep grief.

Perhaps on this Easter morning you can relate to the men who came to the tomb after the women announced the good news – that the tomb is empty.

Perhaps you have come to church a bit jaded, even skeptical, and you just don't understand. You just don't see the proof for such claims - that there is life beyond death - beyond grief, loss, and despair. That love is stronger than the darkness.

But here's the great thing about our Easter story. The ones who come to the tomb don't see Jesus; they don't get any PROOF. They just go back home and continue to hang out together until one day, Jesus appears in the midst of their dark night.

When Jesus appears to the disciples, so the story tells us, what he does first is - SHOW THEM HIS SCARS--touch my wounds, he says--see here is the evidence of the LOWEST POINT OF MY HUMAN LIFE, the time in my life when I was defeated and overcome and when I had been beaten down and I was myself questioning WHY WOULD GOD FORSAKE ME. This is what his scars point to, not his triumph but his tragedy, not his victory but a time when he was vilified, a time of pain and struggle. Think about how else this story could have gone. Jesus could have said, "LOOK, FRIENDS, IT IS I -completely healed. Nothing they did to me has any lasting effect. I am PERFECT again." But he says, "Hey I am scarred and wounded, but these wounds WILL NOT KEEP THE Power AND LIFE OF GOD FROM FLOWING through me to you! And GUESS WHAT! Just as God has sent me into the world, so I send you, not to cover up your scars, not to deny your wounds, but to show people that the same power that raised me from the dead is alive in you."

EASTER is not a promise that your business, or your family, or the Church, or the world will be "like it used to be". It is a promise that the POWER THAT gave you life will never ever abandon you. The power that raised Jesus from the dead can raise you from despair, and that same power is calling you, by name, and is STILL at work DOING A NEW THING in you and in the church and in the world! Easter is the promise that NOTHING IN YOUR PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE has the ultimate power to define you. YOU ARE DEFINED by the divine, the light of God that flows through you and that flows through all creation MAKING ALL THINGS NEW!

And it is this power that gives LIFE, and this is the main thing that Luke wants us to know. He tells us all this so that we might HAVE LIFE, and this is where we find the meaning of Easter, not in the tomb of "proof" but in GOD'S love, present in history AND in the here and now, because proof won't satisfy your longing for LIFE anyway. Think about it. So-called "proofs" amount to little more than a hill of jellybeans.

You don't prove love; you embrace it.

You don't prove power; you experience it.

You don't prove LIFE; YOU LIVE IT!

You don't prove NEW LIFE; you RECEIVE IT!

We are called by name to receive NEW LIFE and share it with the WORLD!

And that, my friends, is better news than bunnies and jellybeans.

It is the reason for all our alleluias this day and everyday!

AMEN! ALLELUIA!