

Copyright Geist Christian Church, March 31, 2024—Easter Sunday

Sermon Title: Jesus Brings Hope

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Text: [Luke 24:1-12](#)

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Jesus brings hope. No matter your station in life at this moment. No matter how you see the world in this particular moment.

What we hear today is Good News. The faithful women who came to the tomb early in the day with the spices they prepared for the burial of Jesus' body find the stone rolled away from the tomb

Jesus brings hope.

Over the last six weeks, we have been in a series called *Wandering Heart: Figuring Out Faith with Peter*. We have been looking at Jesus' life and ministry through the lens of one of his most faithful and most flawed disciples, Peter. Of all the disciples and followers of Jesus, Peter may be most like a modern-day disciple. He could be sitting here with us and would fit right in

He is steadfast and unsteady, a friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer.

At Jesus' arrest and trial, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. In doing so, we might expect him to run away. And to be frank, we could not have blamed him. But yet, Peter had spent enough time with Jesus to know that things were not always as they seemed. He knew that Jesus brought hope. So as the faithful female disciples head to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body for burial, Peter is hanging around.

The women return with the good news, and the other disciples dismiss their report that Jesus is not there. We heard that they called it an idle tale, but the real meaning of the Greek word here is "garbage." In other words, the male disciples' first reaction to the resurrection was garbage. Thank God for the women disciples, the women preachers who were the first to preach the Good News. The news was different for Peter, however.

He is curious. He asks, "Could this really be true?" and turns to run toward the empty tomb, hoping beyond hope that it just might be true.

Charlie Shedd developed a series of talks on raising children—before he had kids—entitled *Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Children*. He and his spouse had their first child, and soon after he adjusted the title of his talks to "Ten Hints for Parents." He and his spouse had their second child and continued giving his talks but altered the title to "A Few Tentative Suggestions for Fellow Strugglers." He and his spouse had their third child and he thought about changing the title again but instead just decided to quit giving the talks altogether and find a new line of work.

Experience can weigh us down. When we think we know it all and have it all, life has a way of reminding us that we don't really know as much as we think we do. Someone once said that the most courageous thing we can do on any given day is get out of bed and put our feet on the floor, ready to live a new day.

It's kind of what we are doing today. In the midst of all that is going on in the world today, in the midst of all that is going on in our lives today, we hear the word from the preachers today:

The stone has been rolled away from the tomb.

He is not here, he has risen.

Just as he said.

We need the hope that Jesus brings, and so we find ourselves in Peter's shoes. We hear the news that we know we need, the news that we are hoping beyond hope that we will hear. And so we run to the empty tomb.

By the way, some scholars say that when the text says that Peter ran, he really only ran the last little bit as he saw the stone was rolled away. It is like when I say I ran a 5K, what I mean is that I ran at the beginning and the last 100 yards or so to the finish line.

Peter Gomes, the late chaplain at Harvard, tells about the time he went to speak at a prep school in the countryside of New Hampshire. It was a really out-of-the-way place with mandatory attendance for the students. It was one of those moments when the audience doesn't really want to be there, and in this case, the speaker doesn't really want to be there, either. But in this moment, for the student body and for Peter Gomes, they were stuck there with one another

He went through his prepared talk, and it went well, better than either side expected. They got to the conclusion of the talk and into the question and answer session. A boy stood up in the middle of the large hall and asked Gomes, "What inspires you?"

Do you have those moments when you open your mouth and you expect something to come out, but it doesn't? Gomes expected either God or Harvard to be the answer to the question of what inspires him.

He said what inspires him is the beginning of each new day. He said, "I rejoice each day that I have a chance to start over."

There is a website called *Smith* that is a collection of six-word memoirs—people both famous and ordinary trying to distill their lives down to six words about what is most important or distinguished or interesting about them. Their tagline is, "Everybody has a story, what is yours?" Everyone is invited to participate, and there is an ongoing gallery of the most recent offerings. It is a popular site mainly because you want to see what people say and also to think about the challenge of fitting something so big as reflecting upon one's life in just six words

Some are poignant... from one person who just lost a loved one: "I still make coffee for two." Some are from celebrities like Stephen Colbert, who says, "Well, I thought it was funny." One student wrote, "I love to make people smile."

For Christians, today is at the core of the faith, and when it comes to this, six words tell us the core of our faith, "Jesus is risen from the dead."

Whatever your station in life, wherever you find yourself in this moment, these six words provide the hope that we are each seeking. As we look around the world today and see the things that break God's heart, that break our hearts, these six words provide the hope that we are seeking.

Fredrick Buechner grew up in a very difficult home. His father was an alcoholic when Fredrick was a teenager; his father died by suicide. One day when he was in his mid-20s, he was walking down a busy city street and heard music coming from the open doors of a church. He had never been in a church before in his life, had never read the Bible or even really heard any of the stories. At this point in his life, Frederick was at a tipping point in his life, dangerously close to following the same path his father had followed. He was drawn into the church by the music coming from that worship service. He came back the next week and the next. Drawn by the music, the bread, the cup, the words he heard, the prayers prayed, the biblical stories that were all new to him—the word of God's love and grace, and hope that was for him. Three months later, he entered seminary, became a pastor, and eventually became one of the most prolific spiritual writers and thinkers of our time.

Asked what he learned in that church, what led him to the Christian faith, Fredrick Buechner said this: "With God, the worst things are never the last things."

The greatest sign of this truth is what we bear witness to today, that the tomb is empty. That empty tomb is the greatest sign of hope for your life, for my life, and for this world. It is a powerful sign of the hope that God, through Jesus Christ, brings to each and every one of us.

Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen, Indeed!

Let Us Pray:

Today we are a people of hope.

We trust that you are a God that is stronger than death.

We trust that Jesus is alive, among us, healing and teaching and present in our world.

We believe that a tomb could not hold him, just like the tombs of our lives cannot keep out the hope and the new life that you bring to every person.

We believe that our story is not over yet, that today is a new beginning.

For you are among us.

Today we are a people of hope.

Amen.