

## **EASTER 2026**

Title: Marvelous Light

Date: April 5, 2026

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” I want to say “Hi” if you are joining us online or on our app. We consider you a part of our church family, and we are so glad you’re spending some time with us! As always, let us know how we can pray for you or serve you.

Well, Happy Easter! You guys clean up nicely! In case we haven’t met yet, my name is Brian, I am the Lead Pastor here at the Suncoast, and I am genuinely thrilled that you are here today. Whether this is your first time walking through those doors, or whether you’ve been here since we were meeting in a middle school cafeteria, today is a day I look forward to every single year.

**In fact, will you help me celebrate church, because today is our churches 20th birthday!!!**

If you have a Bible with you or a Bible app go ahead and turn to John chapter 20. If you don’t have a Bible, no worries, we’ll throw all of this up on the screens. But before we get into things today I want us to read our text together. This is the Apostle John’s eyewitness account of the first Easter morning. John 20, starting in verse 1:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” <sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

So, much to unpack, I am excited for this!

Easter is always exciting because today is a day of celebration, right? You probably have some family coming over later. Maybe there’s a big meal planned. The kids are still on a sugar high from this morning. Easter is a day of celebration.

BUT today is not the celebration of Christianity... AND it's not the celebration of Jesus' teachings... OR His miracles for that matter. TODAY is not even about Jesus death on the cross... I thought that would be a good way to get your attention this morning.

Those things are all good and important, don't misunderstand me, but TODAY is the celebration of an event in history. Today is the celebration of the **RESURRECTION** of Jesus. Today is the celebration of a dead man walking out of a tomb and leaving it empty!

See, if all we had were the teachings of Jesus, we would not be here today, two thousand years later, doing this on the other side of the world on a Sunday morning. If all we had was a guy named Jesus who did some miraculous things and was a bit of a first-century revolutionary, this movement would not have survived the first century. But the fact that there is an empty tomb changes everything.

I am calling today's message: **Marvelous Light**

And I'm calling it that because what I want you to see today is that in Christ there is enough light for everyone in this room. It doesn't matter where you are spiritually today. I don't care if you're a skeptic who got dragged here by your mother-in-law, or if you've been following Jesus for forty years. There is enough light at the empty tomb for all of us.

AND light is what we need today, maybe more than ever, amen? You've seen the statistics over the past few years. Americans today report feeling more isolated, more anxious, and more hopeless than at any point in the last fifty years. The Surgeon General has literally declared loneliness a public health crisis. We are the most connected generation in human history and somehow the most alone. We have more information at our fingertips than any civilization that has ever existed and yet people are drowning in **darkness** about what's true, what's real, and what actually matters.

We talk about this darkness all the time, don't we? Dark seasons. Dark days. Dark valleys. We say things like, "I'm in a really dark place right now." And we mean it emotionally, spiritually. BUT here's what blows my mind about Easter. God took our metaphor and made it literal. He actually, physically, historically raised His Son from the dead in the dark.

See when you picture the first Easter, what do you see? Sunrise, right? Golden light breaking over the horizon. Maybe some angels with a spotlight. Very cinematic. Very inspirational meme like. But what if I told you we've been picturing it wrong? What if the resurrection didn't happen at sunrise at all? What if God deliberately chose to bring the Light of Life back into the world at the darkest possible moment?

Follow me here because this changes everything about the story. We have all these Americanized images of the first Easter. The sun peeking above the horizon as the start of

the third day. A blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus emerging from the tomb in slow motion with an orchestra swelling in the background. It's very Chosen season finale, right?

BUT you have to put yourself into the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. In first century, Jewish culture, the day did not start at sunrise like it does here in the west. In the Jewish mind, the day began at sundown of the previous day. So, the third day—Easter Sunday—actually started at sundown on Saturday night.

Now, I promise that's not just some useless fact you can impress people with at your Easter dinner later. This is going somewhere, so stick with me.

So, Jesus was crucified on Friday. He hung on the cross for about six hours and breathed His last breath around three in the afternoon. He cried out, "It is finished" and died. Since Friday was called the Day of Preparation—because if you needed to run errands, hit the grocery store, do your Amazon returns, whatever—you had to get it done before sundown because the Sabbath was coming and no one could work. Same thing with burying a body. You had to get it done by sundown.

So, the disciples and friends of Jesus that remained and didn't run get the legal rights to bury Him. They lowered the cross, pulled Jesus' bloody body off the nails, and began the burial process which included wrapping the body like a mummy and soaking it in oils and spices. But since they were running out of daylight, it seems they got the body wrapped but didn't have time for the oils and spices. They quickly placed Jesus into the tomb donated by Joseph of Arimathea—which was basically a cave—a massive boulder was rolled in front of the entrance and sealed with what was essentially a tamper-proof seal so the officials would know if anyone tried to mess with it. And just for good measure, Roman soldiers were stationed at the entrance to guard it.

By this time the sun was below the horizon, last light, the Sabbath had begun so they hurried home.

The next morning, they woke up, and maybe you've been in this position. Something devastating happens the day before and you wake up and for just a second you forget. Has that ever happened to you? But then it hits you. This was no dream. The man they had placed their hope and faith in as their Messiah was still dead.

BUT remember, Jesus said He would rise again on the third day. Which would be when according to first century Jews? Sundown on Saturday night! And I don't know the exact moment it happened, but my guess is about a nanosecond after the last rays of sunlight disappeared over the Middle Eastern horizon, God—without even trying—spoke to His Son in the depths of death and sin and darkness and said, "Come alive, my Son." And His marvelous light began to shine through the cracks of the tomb!

BUT here is the part that gets me. On that third day, with the sun having set and darkness engulfing the world, God spoke to His Son and Jesus rose from the grave as the Light of Life with ZERO fanfare! Without a single person around to greet Him! No camera crew. Nobody livestreaming it. Nobody posting it to their story. The guards weren't even there because when the light started shining through the cracks of the tomb they panicked and bolted. So, now it's just Jesus and the angels who rolled the stone away.

That was Jesus' big resurrection party! An audience of none! Here it is pitch black outside and the Light of Life standing there—the risen Son of God—and no one is there to welcome Him.

You have to love the humanity of this! I think as Jesus walks out of the tomb, and He realizes that His followers were not adding things up as quickly as He thought. No one had been tailgating, counting down to His big reveal. When He doesn't see a single soul, and I'm reading into this a little, but I think He had to laugh.

The disciples were still thinking it was game over. None of them put the pieces together and made their way out there that night in faith to witness the resurrection. So here is Jesus... just chillin' by Himself next to His own empty grave. Can you picture that?

**This is important because I think we assume that God only shows up in the dramatic moments.** The big reveal. The cinematic sunrise. But the resurrection of Jesus—the most important event in human history—happened in the dark. With no audience. No applause.

AND that tells me something about our God. He's not performing for a crowd. He's not waiting for the lighting to be right. He does His deepest work in the dark, and often when nobody's watching.

Tim Keller put it this way. He said: **“The resurrection was the great divine reversal. It was not just an event in history; it was the event that reversed history.”**

**And it happened in the dark!** Jesus said of Himself in John chapter 8, verse 12:

**“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

Throughout the Bible, light is always equated with life. Light equals life. But the resurrection happened in the dark. Because God specializes in bringing light into dark places.

See, what I want to show you today is that no matter what kind of darkness you walked in here carrying this morning, there is enough light at the empty tomb for you. Specifically, I think there is enough light for three groups of people this Easter. AND the first group is those with fears and doubts. Write this down:

### 1. There's enough light for your fears and doubts.

There is enough light at the empty tomb for those who want to poke their head in and ask questions and have some fears and doubts about all of this.

AND I want you to hear me—Jesus and this church welcome you. Seriously! Of course you have questions. Of course you have doubts. Of course you are a little skeptical. We are talking about a dead man coming back to life. I would expect you to be skeptical of that!

And the text actually models this for us. Let's go back to John 20 because John writes himself into this account in some ways that genuinely make me laugh. Look at verses 2 through 9 again. Mary sees the stone is rolled away on that first Easter and runs to find Peter and—as John writes it:

<sup>2</sup> ...the other disciple, the one Jesus loved...

He wanted to make sure we knew who he was. Out of the eleven remaining disciples whom Jesus all LIKED, John wanted us to know that he, John, was the one Jesus LOVED. Then Mary tells them the tomb is empty and look at what John writes next:

<sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple [the one Jesus loved] outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

Is everyone tracking with this? John was loved most by Jesus AND he could run faster. And John was the one writing this. Can we just stop and give John a round of applause?

But when John gets to the tomb, he bends over and peeks in but doesn't go inside. He was fast but maybe didn't have the courage to go all the way in. Then here comes Peter. Peter was slower but Peter only knew two speeds: zero and full send. So, Peter doesn't wait around. Peter goes straight into the tomb. AND notice what he sees:

He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

This detail matters. Thieves would not have unwrapped the body and then neatly folded the linens. This was something entirely different. Then John writes in verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, [Just in case you forgot from two verses ago that he got there first...] also went inside. He saw and believed.

Something happened in John's heart the moment he stepped inside that empty tomb. AND that is what today is about. Something happening inside your heart.

But here's the thing I love about the honesty of Scripture. John doesn't leave it at that. Writing twenty to thirty years after the resurrection—and we already know John is not afraid to make himself look good—he adds this parenthetical thought in verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

He's saying, looking back, if we're honest, we still didn't fully get it. Even standing in the empty tomb. And I think that is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible for anyone here today who is still investigating. It tells us:

**You don't have to have it all figured out to take a step toward Jesus.**

The resurrection of Jesus is the most investigated event in human history. People have investigated from the archaeological fields, historical fields, literary and philosophical fields, and there is only one explanation that holds up. Jesus rose from the grave. It happened. It is historical. There is no other credible explanation for why a small Jewish sect from first century Palestine survived to become the most significant movement in human history.

BUT that doesn't mean everyone believes. So, your questions are welcomed here. Your investigation is welcomed. God is not intimidated by your fears or doubts.

We see this even more clearly a few verses later. Thomas missed the first resurrection appearance. When the other disciples told him they'd seen Jesus, Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." I'm sure the other disciples backed away slowly when he said that. Like, "Bro, you might want to stand over there because when the lightning hits I don't want to be near you."

But a week later, Jesus shows up again, and what does He say to Thomas? Does He scold him? Does He punish him? No. Verse 27:

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

See, that’s because we’re all different. For some of us, the first time we heard the Gospel, that was all it took. But others of us take stuff apart. We take our cars apart. We take our computers apart. We’ve voided every warranty we’ve ever had. You’re just the kind of person that has to get in there and poke around and figure things out for yourself. And Jesus is not offended by that. He invited Thomas to come and investigate closer, not further away.

AND here is what I love about this. Researchers at USC found that when people encounter something that challenges their deeply held beliefs, the brain activates the same regions associated with physical threat—the amygdala fires, the fight-or-flight response kicks in. Your brain literally treats a new idea like a danger. That’s why belief isn’t just an intellectual exercise. It’s a whole-person experience. And Jesus knew this two thousand years before the brain scan was invented. He didn’t argue Thomas into faith. He said, come close... touch... see... experience.

So, here’s what I want you to do if you’re in this camp today. Don’t run from your questions. Bring them to Jesus. Investigate. Read the Gospel of John this week. Ask the hard questions. But be honest with yourself, are your doubts truly intellectual, or are they a wall you’ve built to keep God at a safe distance?

Because Jesus is willing to show you His wounds. He’s not threatened by your investigation. And my prayer is that like Thomas, one day you’ll say, “My Lord and my God.”

There’s enough light at the empty tomb for your fears and doubts. But there’s also enough light for a second group of people today:

## **2. There’s enough light for your pain.**

And if that is you this Easter, if you find yourself hurting, grieving, suffering, I want you to know we don’t rush past that. We don’t skip over it just to get to the resurrection.

What we did skip, however, was the part of the story with Mary Magdalene. She was the one at the beginning who went back and told Peter and John about the stone being rolled away. Well, when they took off running, she stayed behind and hung around the tomb. Look at verse 11:

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb  
<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the  
 other at the foot. <sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

Now you have to understand—the angels were a little confused. They had just witnessed a resurrection and now this woman is weeping, so they're like, did something change? Did we not get the memo? What happened? And she says, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him." Look at verse 14:

<sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

This is one of the most important details in the whole story and I don't want you to miss it. She's been crying, it's dark, her eyes are swollen, and she was not expecting to see a living Jesus. She was looking for a dead body. She had come out there that morning to finish the burial process—to bring the oils and spices they didn't have time for on Friday. She wasn't coming to witness a resurrection. She was coming to properly bury a corpse.

And I wonder how many of us are doing the same thing. You come to God expecting death, expecting disappointment, expecting the same old story—and you can't see that He's standing right in front of you, alive!

Jesus says to her in verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

She thinks he's the gardener and says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." She said that because nobody was thinking resurrection. They were still thinking game over. BUT then Jesus does something that wrecks me every time I read it. Verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

He just says her name. That's it. One word. And she immediately recognized His voice and cried out, "Rabboni!" which means Teacher.

See, Mary before she met Jesus was possessed by seven demons. Seven. You work with some people or have an in-law who maybe have one or two and you know what that's like. She had seven evil spirits that tormented her and Jesus healed her and she became one of His most devoted followers. So, think about what's going on in her mind at this moment. She's not just mourning the loss of a friend. She's not just grieving the death of a dream.

In the back of her mind, she has to be thinking, “If the man who set me free is dead, what’s keeping those demons from coming back?” She lost someone she loved AND she might lose her sanity.

Some of you know exactly what that feels like. To lose the person or the thing that was holding you together and feel like you’re going to lose yourself too.

John Eldredge writes, “The resurrection accounts are not a story of heroes. They are the story of broken, grieving people encountering a living God who meets them in their pain before He sends them on their mission.”

I love that. Jesus didn’t scold Mary for not believing. He just said her name.

Psychologists have long studied something called “recognition through voice identity.” Research shows that the human brain processes a familiar, trusted voice differently than an unfamiliar one. A loved one’s voice like a mother or father activates areas of the brain associated with safety, emotional memory, and attachment. **Meaning:** Mary’s whole body recognized Jesus before her mind could catch up. His voice cut through the grief and the fear and the darkness and reached something deep inside her.

**That is what the voice of Jesus still does today.**

Our message as followers of Jesus and as a church is not that your life will be perfect if you accept Christ. We are not the new-Mercedes-in-the-driveway-if-you-just-have-faith church. We’re people just like everyone else. We go through pain. We battle cancer. We fight anxiety and depression. We suffer loss. We have broken relationships. BUT—Easter, the resurrection—is the validation that no matter how dark things are right now, the Light is coming!

No matter how bad the heartbreak is right now, the Light is coming! It might not be today. It might not be tomorrow. But the resurrection is the proof that darkness does not get the final word!

- Some of you have lost loved ones, and God sent me to tell you, the Light is coming!
- Some of you have suffered and sacrificed because you believe your treasure is in heaven and not on this earth, God sent me to tell you, the Light is coming!
- Some of you are battling something right now that you haven’t told a single soul about, an addiction, depression, dark thoughts, today I want you to hear that the Light is coming!

The tomb is empty! We win! Not because of anything we've done, but because of what He's already done!

So, here's what I want you to do with this. If you are in a dark season right now, stop looking for a dead God. Stop going to the tomb expecting to find a corpse. He's not there. He's alive. And He knows your name. Just like He called out to Mary in the darkness, He is calling out to you. Will you let Him speak your name today? Will you let His voice cut through the noise and the grief and the fear?

Maybe that means for the first time in a long time you actually talk to God this week. Not a religious prayer. Just an honest conversation. "God, I'm hurting. I don't understand. But I'm choosing to believe you're alive and that you see me." That's all it takes. He met Mary in the garden while she was still mourning. He'll meet you right where you are too.

There's enough light at the empty tomb for your pain. And finally, there's enough light for one more group:

### **3. There's enough light for your shame.**

In John chapter 21, after the resurrection, Jesus goes and has a one-on-one with Peter. And He went to Peter specifically because Peter was the disciple who had let Jesus down the most.

You might remember the story. On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter denied knowing Him three times. This is the same Peter who just hours earlier had sworn to Jesus, "Even if everyone else abandons you, I never will." And then when the heat came—when it actually cost him something—he caved. He swore and cursed and said, "I don't know the man."

And I think that's why Peter ran straight into the tomb when he heard it was empty. He didn't hesitate. He didn't wait for backup. Because I think going through his mind was this: either I am going to find out who stole the body and take out all this guilt on them, or if there is even a chance He is alive, I want to fall at His feet and beg forgiveness. That's the only reason Peter went straight in. Guilt was chasing him faster than his legs could carry him.

And when he got inside and saw the linen folded neatly, he knew immediately—this was not thieves. Grave robbers don't unwrap a body and fold the linens. Something else had happened here.

AND whether we have known each other for 15 years or 15 minutes I want you to hear this. So many of us are carrying the same things into this moment today that Peter carried into

that empty tomb. This very real sense that we have let God down. We have let our family down. We have let our spouse or our kids down. We have let ourselves down. And just like Peter, what you need more than anything this Easter is grace and redemption.

In John 21 we see Jesus pull Peter aside and ask him three times, “Do you love me?” Once for each time Peter denied Him. And after each answer Jesus says, “Then go feed my sheep.” Jesus is saying, “Peter, you are still my guy. I still want you. I still have a purpose for your life. Even though you blew it. Even though you said what you said. I knew you were going to let me down before I ever chose you, and I chose you anyway. I didn’t pick you because you were perfect. I picked you because I wanted to show you my grace!”

Before Peter could even get his rehearsed apology out, Jesus stopped him. He didn’t punish him. He didn’t reject him. He didn’t lecture him. He restored him. The cross is about forgiveness and grace, and the resurrection is the proof that the grace is real and it’s permanent.

Dallas Willard once said, “Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude.”

Peter was trying to earn his way back. He was rehearsing his speech. He was trying to figure out how to make it right. And Jesus basically said, you can’t earn this. Just receive it!

This is the part of the Gospel that trips people up. We are so wired for transaction—I mess up, I make up for it; I fail, I try harder—we are so hardwired for that, that the idea of free, unmerited, no-strings-attached grace feels too good to be true.

But the research on shame actually confirms why this matters so much. Researcher Brené Brown has spent decades studying what shame does to the human brain and body. Shame tells us, “You are not just someone who did a bad thing. You ARE bad. You are unworthy of love and belonging.” And what the research shows is that shame cannot survive being spoken. When shame is met with empathy and connection, it loses its power.

AND that is exactly what Jesus did with Peter. Peter’s shame said, “You’re a traitor. You’re a coward. You’re disqualified.” And Jesus looked at him with empathy and connection and said, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus didn’t just forgive Peter’s sin. He spoke to Peter’s shame. He met him in the deepest, most vulnerable place and said, you still belong to me!

Listen to me. I don’t know your story. I don’t know when you walked away, or how you walked away, or how far you walked away. But Easter isn’t about God shaking His fist in

your face. NO! Easter is about Jesus showing you the wounds in His hands and feet and side that He received for YOUR forgiveness, for MY forgiveness, and saying, "I'm offering you a brand-new start. A clean slate with a holy God."

So here is what I need you to do with this. Stop rehearsing your apology. Stop trying to earn your way back. Stop thinking you have to get yourself cleaned up before God will take you back. Come as you are! That's the whole point. Jesus didn't wait for Peter to get his act together! He went looking for Peter! And He's looking for you right now!

Jesus said He was the light and today there is light in an empty tomb for those who want to investigate and ask hard questions—come and see! There is enough light for those whose hearts are broken and whose pain is so deep they can't see straight—He knows your name! And there is enough light for those who have been carrying shame and guilt and feel like they've gone too far—His grace is bigger than your worst day!

I love how John records it. He says some people got to the tomb first. John got there before Peter. Peter went in before John. Mary was there before all of them. Thomas didn't show up for a week! BUT it didn't matter who got there first and it didn't matter who got there last. The tomb was still empty for all of them!

Some of you, maybe your spouse got to the tomb before you. They've been following Jesus and waiting for you to come around. Maybe a friend or a parent or a grandparent got to the tomb first and they've been praying for you for years. Maybe your kids got to the tomb before you— isn't that something. But right now, today, there is hope for those of us who got to the tomb last. There is light enough for everyone to see.

And if you're sitting here today and you have never put your faith in Jesus—or maybe you did a long time ago but you walked away and today feels like the right day to come home—I want to give you that opportunity.

Because here is what the resurrection means for you practically. It means your past does not define you. It means your failures are not final. It means death itself could not hold Jesus down and it will not hold you down either. It means that the anxiety you're carrying, the shame that's been following you, the grief that has parked itself on your chest and won't let you breathe—none of it gets the last word. The tomb is empty! AND that changes everything!

The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. It's not about being good enough. It's not about having all your questions answered. It's about believing that the tomb is empty and that the one who walked out of it is offering you new life.

So, as we close today, let's bow our heads and create some space to be honest before God.

[PRAYER TIME]