

Homily
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Easter Sunday/Resurrection of the Lord
April 5, 2026
10 AM

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Theme: Bless the Lives We Actually Have: Blessed Are Those Who Hope Still

[prayer]

Our gospel writer tells us that “as the first day of the week was dawning,” women who were among Jesus’s disciples went to the tomb (v. 1 NRSVUE). John’s gospel adds the detail that it was still dark out (20:1). Jesus died just prior to sundown on Friday, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath; his burial was rushed so as not to violate Sabbath law. Now that the Sabbath had concluded, the women returned to finish the burial rites. But they could not access the tomb because it was guarded. And so, they stood at a distance, in the dark, helpless and grieving.

I encounter a lot of helplessness, and hopelessness, in my line of work. There is often good reason for us to feel such. Our lives are imperfect, our bodies fragile. People we love get sick and die. The pace and demands of life can be overwhelming. Security and stability may feel out of our grasp. We struggle with doubt, jealousy, anger, fear, sadness. We harbor regrets, guilt, and shame.

And if that were not enough, questions of justice, mercy, and moral courage are pressing in on our lives and our communities with increasing urgency. Every news cycle seems to bring another harbinger of doom. We lament the division and the struggle. We lament our suffering and the suffering of others. We rail against the darkness in our world and in ourselves.

All this is to say: If you are feeling a disconnect between your actual life and the joy of this morning, you are not alone. There is a good chance the person sitting next to you may feel the same. Just because the calendar chose today to celebrate the miracle of Jesus rising from the dead, that does not mean the messy realities of our lives are miraculously erased.

Our popular imagination depicts Jesus rising from the dead with the rising of the sun. But the resurrection did not happen at dawn. Jesus rose long before then in the pre-dawn hours. There was no one around to witness the moment he stood up, pulled off death's shroud, and walked out of the tomb. The resurrection happened in darkness. And the women who went to tend his body also walked to his tomb in darkness.

While we could dismiss the gospel writers' timestamp as historical trivia, the fact that both the Resurrection and the women's discovery of the empty tomb happened in darkness contains an important theological truth. Here it is: Darkness is the seedbed of hope.

This appears to be both a divine and a natural rule. New life always begins in the dark. A seed sprouts in the dark of the earth. A butterfly emerges from the darkness of a cocoon. A baby is born from the darkness of a womb. And on this day when we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, we ponder the wondrous, impossible mystery that life and hope can emerge from even the obliterating darkness of the grave.

Hope sprouts in the dark. And for Christians, hope sprouted in the darkness of Good Friday, when Jesus breathed his last and declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). What was finished was the separation between God and humanity. The Apostle Paul declared, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). God's love prevails over all. And God sealed that promise by raising Jesus from the dead so that we understand His love is sovereign over everything, even our own deaths.

A Christian's greatest vocation is to be a practitioner of hope. Hope is not optimism. Optimism is the passive belief that things will eventually work out for the better. Hope is not passive; it is active, a verb. Hope is a habit, a discipline. It is something we practice, cultivate, nourish. Like the women who made their way to Jesus's tomb before the dawn, not knowing what they would encounter, we build our spiritual capacity for hope by looking for signs of new life even while it is still dark. We are not hopeful because Jesus's resurrection magically fixes everything. We are hopeful because Jesus passed from death to life. And so, his resurrection

gives us the strength and the courage to keep walking through the darkness until we see the dawn. Hope is the discipline of living in the already-but-not-yet reality that the darkness will not overcome the light (John 1:5).

The resurrected body of Jesus points to this truth. When the women encountered the angel at the tomb, he identified Jesus as “the crucified one” (v.5). The English translation unfortunately does not capture the fullness of the Greek’s meaning. The angel was describing Jesus’s crucifixion as an ongoing reality. The Resurrection does not erase the Crucifixion. The Risen Jesus bears on his body the marks of his death. These marks are not merely four nail holes and a spear wound in his side. Pilate had Jesus flogged and beaten to within an inch of his life. His body would have been a bloody, tattered mess. But it is that same body that appeared to the women, to the apostles, to all the people who saw the resurrected Jesus before he ascended into heaven. In his resurrected form Jesus embodies the kind of hope we hold as Christians: Death is still a reality, but it is not the final reality.

The appearance of the Risen Jesus radically changed the disciples from frightened, helpless victims into bold evangelists for the good and hopeful news of the Gospel. The Resurrection transformed their lives. The invitation on this day, and every day, is to let it transform our lives, too. The Resurrection propels us into the world as bearers of hope. Jesus told the women not to be afraid, but instead to go and tell the other disciples that he was going before them to Galilee, where they would see him (v. 10). Galilee was the primary location of Jesus’s ministry, where he healed the sick, fed the hungry, and taught the masses. To be bearers of hope, then, is to go into the world and join in the mission of Jesus – to be doers of justice, and lovers of mercy, and to walk humbly with each other and God (Mic 6:8). We are called to be lights in the darkness, pointing to the ways God is going before us opening graves and bringing new life out of death.

Our vocation, our job as Christians, is to be Easter people in a Good Friday world. Our lives frequently do not reflect the perfect joy of Easter morning. To admit that is not faithlessness; it is spiritual honesty. But against that reality of darkness, we carry the counterweight of hope, the assurance that because of Easter morning, God’s triumph is absolute. There is deep hope for the world because the tomb is empty. Even though all the darkness of the world conspired against Jesus, even nailed him to a cross, God still overcame. And one day, His divine reign will be fully realized, where God will wipe every tear from our eyes and “Death will be no

more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the one who [is] seated on the throne will say, ‘See, I am making all things new’” (Rev 21:4-5).

In the meantime, in the words of Christian historian Kate Bowler:

*Blessed are we who stretch out our hands
to [God]
in doubt and grief,
in sickness of body and mind and spirit,
our prayers not fully realized,
rejoicing... anyway.*

*For that is what makes us Easter people:
carrying forth the realized hope of the
Resurrected One,
singing our alleluias great and small,
while it is still dark.¹*

Blessed are we who hope still...for we will see the Risen Christ.

Alleluia!

Amen.

¹ From *The Lives We Actually Have*, page 210.