

A Resurrected Life, or Dessert
The Rev. Amy Spagna
Easter Day – April 5, 2026
Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

*Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands for our offenses given;
therefore at God's right hand he stands, enthroned as Lord of heaven;
therefore let us joyful be, and sing to God right thankfully
loud songs of Alleluia!*¹

If Palm Sunday was the appetizer, and Good Friday the main course, today, Easter Day, is the richest of rich desserts. Like any such ending, it is kind of ridiculous on its face. It is an undisputed fact: someone who's been killed as dead as Jesus was killed can't simply get up and walk around again. For that to happen definitely requires some kind of intervention. This is not at all like what happens to the character Westley in the movie *The Princess Bride*. After he is tortured to the point of being mostly dead, his friends are able to revive him by giving him a chocolate coated magic pill they get from a pair of elderly miracle workers. In the real world, that kind of miraculous revival just about as inconceivable as it gets. However, that did not stop God from doing it anyway. How exactly God managed to bring it about is a mystery. All we can say for certain is that *something* happened. It was accompanied by an earthquake, and the arrival of an angel who delivers God's standard message to frightened humans: "Do not be afraid."

¹ Martin Luther, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands." *Christ Lag in Todesbanden* (chorale: J.S. Bach). *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: church Publishing, 1985), 186.

To be fair, there is a lot for Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to fear when they arrive at the tomb. It's not just the earthquake and the sights of the angel, the missing stone, and the soldiers standing guard who'd basically short circuited. It's that Jesus is not where they expect him to be. Nor is he in the state they expect him to be. And the implications of that fact are enormous. What he'd told them would happen, had. Not only did it change life as they knew it, there were also several practical considerations: how would everyone else react to the news? Would they claim, as the Jewish authorities would later bribe the soldiers to say, the body had been stolen, and just go back to their fishing boats? Or would they, as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had, take the angel's word for it, see their risen Lord, and run to tell others about it?

It would take time for Jesus' first followers to completely understand what had happened, as far as it could ever really be explained. What they knew right away was that the HOW of it didn't matter nearly as much as either the WHAT, or the end results of the WHAT, did. Those results are ones we, as their descendants, know well. They begin with the invitation to come and see, to pattern our lives after his, and to do our best to love our neighbors as ourselves. They end with the undoing of death as we think we know it. From the beginning, these results were what enabled the disciples to go into the world and continue to tell the story: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power... he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen

by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead"
(Acts 10:38-43, NRSV)

The person telling the story in this case is Peter. You might not believe it, but this is the very same guy who had a habit of putting his foot into his mouth, and who had run away and hid on Friday afternoon after denying that he knew Jesus. Like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, he also has been fundamentally changed by this event. By the time he's speaking here, several months after that first Easter day, he's found a confidence he lacked the last time we saw him on Friday. More importantly, Peter is also beginning to realize that Jesus and his message of peace are not just limited to Jesus' inner circle and the Jewish community in Jerusalem. It's for everyone. And the God who has done this is "... not a God who can be enclosed and narrated in a story about the past... it is also a challenge for Peter, who is recognizing that Jesus' lordship has implications for Peter's faith community. If Jesus has overcome death, imperial power and cultural identity are no longer determinative."² Instead, it is faith in the risen Christ which is determinative – not just in terms of our lives in this time, but for all time.

And THAT is the story, no matter who tells it, or where, or when they tell it. Jesus lives. And because he lives, life is changed, permanently. But what does it *mean* when we say Christ's death and resurrection have changed our lives forever?

The taking away of sin and undoing of death as we know it are just the beginning. A healthy dose of God's self-emptying love is also included, as is a teaspoon of willingness on our part to accept both that love, and the rights and responsibilities it

² Jerusha Matsen Neal, "Commentary on Acts 10:34-43."
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord/commentary-on-acts-1034-43-18> [accessed March 30, 2026].

places on us. As we will reaffirm together in a few minutes – and which we will promise to support Tucker and Chip in learning as they grow – those rights and responsibilities include continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers; and respecting the dignity of every human being. Those promises are all-or-nothing proposition, with death, life, and everything else in between included. They're not like a buffet, where we can choose only the dishes which look delicious to us. Instead, we get to put every bit of this new resurrection life onto our plates. While that doesn't mean it will all taste good, all of the time, it does mean that we too can participate in seeing the angel outside the empty tomb; hearing the message that he is not here, for he has been raised; and, in the words of the 4th century preacher St. John Chrysostom, join in the proclamation:

O death, where is thy sting?

O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated!

Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!

Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!

Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;

for Christ having risen from the dead,

is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!³

³ *The Easter Sermon of St. John Chrysostom.*
http://anglicansonline.org/special/Easter/chrysostom_easter.html [accessed April 2, 2026].