



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

**EASTER
DAY**

APRIL 20, 2025

A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham

Alleluia. The Lord has risen!

He has risen, indeed. Alleluia

Welcome to our guests from far-flung places. Welcome to those of us we have not seen since Christmas. That's not meant to be a joke at your expense. Those who have not graced our pews – or any pews – since Christmas hardly should be condemned to being the butt of a joke. They are in their own way prophets who suggest to us that what we as a church or parish is doing no longer meets their need for the divine. They in their absence warn us that continuing to do the same thing we have been doing as a church for years or decades or centuries and expecting a different result is foolhardy.

That is something we at St. Andrew's need to hear. This is our last Easter service in this sanctuary. And the penultimate Sunday service of Holy Eucharist in this building. On May 1, we will enter the diaspora when our entire facility and property is sold. For a period of time, we will be worshipping out of a suitcase at the Destin Community Center. On several holiday weekends, when the community center is closed and unavailable, we anticipate gathering at the home of one of our parishioners. Just like the first followers of Christ did as the church was being born.

Meanwhile, we will pray that our efforts to find a new home in Destin will be successful...and sooner rather than later.

But how much are we, indeed, like those followers of Christ on that first Easter morning? Jesus' followers thought they had lost their leader. Jesus was dead. Gone. And his disciples were horrified. Terrified. Despondent and distraught. Huddled and hiding, no doubt trying to make sense of it all. Trying to envision a future without Jesus. As we here try to envision our community of St. Andrew's in a future away from its home of nearly a century on this plot of ground by the sea on Harbor Blvd.

We all could use a powerful dose of resurrection.

Do you ever wish you could have been there? Do you ever wish you could have seen the stone roll back and Jesus emerge from the tomb? That is the world we live in now. A helicopter collides with a jet on final approach in Washington, and we watch it happen over and over and over again. And, yet, would any of us deny that seeing the recorded images of that tragedy were somehow more affecting than a dozen eyewitness accounts?

How often do we, in trying to explain the impact or significance of an experience or event in our lives, see an audience with eyes glazed over, completely unable to comprehend why we were so shaken or stirred by what we had experienced. So we just give up and say, "You had to be there."

But none of us were there. None of us saw Jesus step out of the tomb. None of us ventured warily into the empty tomb and were perplexed. None were confronted by men in dazzling clothes. And none of us were dismissed by incredulous men who thought the women who had entered the tomb and reported their findings were spinning an idle tale.

And yet...and yet...here we are on a Sunday morning in spring two millennia later celebrating that idle tale, what some might and do call today, "fake news." Because for us, Jesus Christ actually is "risen today." Alleluia.

What does that mean to us? In his being raised from the dead, if we can even begin grasp it, Jesus not only has redeemed and reconciled humanity and creation with God, but also has conquered sin and death. Having suffered the most pernicious injustice ever known and the most gruesome and humiliating death humanity then had devised, having been laid in the tomb by distraught and terrified disciples, Jesus would emerge and walk and talk and eat with friends.

He would brandish an uncorrupted body, and show the world that death was no more, that even the most evil of acts was no match for the power and love of the God who created us. That nothing we can do could defeat that incredible, incomprehensible love that Jesus revealed, or that unfathomable trust and confidence in God that Jesus showed us, by submitting to the cross, only to be raised on the third day, the day we celebrate as Easter.

Because even though we were not there to see the empty tomb or hear out the women who did see it, we accept that Jesus was raised from the dead. We call Easter the greatest feast of the Church. And we understand the

resurrection as the defining doctrine of our Christian faith. But is that enough?

Does the vision of Jesus' stepping out of the tomb, raised from the dead, gobsmack us? Are we so struck by this most momentous event in the history of creation, that something deep inside us is reformed forever, and the direction of our lives is unalterably changed. That we will work as hard as we can and suffer as much as we must to be the people God is calling us to be? Does the resurrection of Jesus so resonate with the divine presence in our hearts that we are seized in mind and body, heart and soul, that we will love as God loves us, trust as Jesus trusted, and become not just reformed, but transformed into the imitators of Christ we are called to be?

In his recent column in the *New York Times*, entitled, "A Surprising Route to the Best Life Possible," columnist David Brooks offers some compelling insights into this notion of being "seized."¹ "The capacity to be seized," he writes, "is a great and underappreciated talent." Brooks observes that:

People commit to great projects, they endure hard challenges, because they are entranced, enchanted. Some notion or activity has grabbed them, set its hooks inside them, aroused some possibility, fired the imagination.

...[U]nbidden, almost involuntarily, a commitment has been made — to some activity or ideal — a quiet passion has been inflamed. Some arduous journey has begun.

....

Like falling in love, these ignition moments happen at the deepest layer of our unconsciousness — that dark region where interests ignite, desires form, the motivational core of our being.

....

[I]t's not because you calculated your way there; it's because some flame was ignited by a force greater, darker and more passionate than your reasoning mind; it irradiates you, conquers you and demands obedience.

¹ David Brooks, "A Surprising Route to the Best Life Possible," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/27/opinion/persistence-work-difficulty.html> (accessed March 27, 2025).

When we are seized by the moment of an encounter with the resurrection, when we are seized by the call of the risen Christ, when we are seized by the love of Jesus Christ, we will be transformed.

This unreasonable, impossible, inexplicable, deep-seated desire to live an authentic Christian life will give us strength and power we have never known.

Fast than a speeding bullet.

More powerful than a locomotive.

Able to leap tall buildings with a single bound.

None of us is Superman or Wonder Woman. None of us is God. None of us live and love as Jesus did. And none of us ever will. But we are made for the journey. And we are made to strive.

The sculptor Henry Moore exaggerated but still captured the essential point: "The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for your whole life. And the most important thing is — it must be something you cannot possibly do!"² The resurrection calls us to make the effort to what seems impossible, to live the life of perfect love that Jesus exemplified.

When we are seized by the resurrection, we will

Dream the impossible dream.

Fight the unbeatable foe.

Bear with unbearable sorrow.

Run where the brave dare not go.

Because when we embrace the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when we are perplexed and terrified and amazed as those first witnesses to the empty tomb, we will become driven by something beyond reason that seizes our very being at a profoundly deep level and insinuates Christ's vision and presence and power into our every thought, word, and deed.

² *Id.*

And in our effort to truly imitate Jesus in our daily lives, we will find, perhaps, that peace of Christ, which passes all understanding. Because we will be at peace with our souls.

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