

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

***“Christ is Alive!”***

All around the world this morning - Christians are proclaiming Happy Easter - which means that Christ is alive! That is what Easter is all about – Jesus died, rose, and He promised to come and take us with Him, one day, and He always keeps His promises!

This morning on this Easter Sunday, I would like to suggest to you that there are three promises of Easter Sunday. Each promise is marked by emptiness:

- An empty cross,
- The empty burial clothes,
- And an empty tomb.

Just the fact that these are empty gives us the complete assurance that God's promises are so very real. Christianity is based upon the truth that Jesus arose from the tomb to defeat death and sin. If Jesus had not come out of that tomb, we would be like every other religion in the world – we would be following a dead leader. How very grave!

Buddha founded Buddhism but Buddha died. Judaism was founded by Abraham, but Abraham has died, too. Islam was founded by Muhammad and he also died. All of these people never left their graves. We Christians, worshipping the one true God, was founded by Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, who arose out of the grave and He still lives! He set us free from sin and eternal death, giving us the hope of spending all eternity with Him!

What Jesus suffered for us was not an easy death. We went through Maundy Thursday, emptying the sanctuary of all of the things until there was an empty altar. We had a service on Good Friday at noon, during which we went through all of the things that Jesus suffered – for those 6 hours from 9 am to 3 PM. It was a really difficult time for Him. We need to never forget just what Jesus went through on our behalf. I do not think we can ever really appreciate exactly what He did - unless we know exactly what He did. In the movie “The Passion of the Christ,” the torture scene showing what Jesus went through for you and me – did not even touch on it. We just cannot even imagine what He went through and the agony that Jesus endured on our behalf. On that cross, Jesus actually defeated sin. We filled the cross with flowers today – because what HE did on the cross made our souls beautiful. The cross remains empty because that is where our sin disappeared, through Jesus Christ as our Savior – and not only is the cross empty but so is His tomb! We visited Israel twice, and we went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and there is an empty tomb there. Then there is the Garden Tomb – and there is an empty tomb there. As a matter of fact, when you close the door, when you are inside the Garden Tomb, it says, He is not here -He is arisen. People are always debating – which one was it? Was it the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Garden Tomb? It does not matter – it is empty! So who cares- the fact that the tomb was empty, wherever it was is what matters.

The Bible tells us there is no other Name given under Heaven by which we can be saved; that

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Name is Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah. Because the cross is empty, we have the full promise of eternal glory with God - fulfilled. Since Jesus died for our sins, God looks at the notations beside all of our names in the Book of Life and all He can see is His Son's blood with the notation "Forgiven." How good is that – to know that He dies so that we could be forgiven? God the Father sees the righteousness of Jesus instead of our unrighteousness.

On that first Easter morning, just before dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, went to the tomb so they could anoint Jesus' body with spices and oils. This was quite a solemn task. On the way there, I am sure that they were wondering who was going to roll the big heavy stone away from the tomb so they could get in. And when they got to the tomb entrance, they felt the earth shake. They were frightened, but they continued toward the tomb. When they got to the front of it, they were absolutely shocked to see the Roman soldiers unconscious and the rock was already rolled away. They saw a man dressed in white sitting there and, they became even more frightened. The young man told them that they were there to see Jesus, the One who was crucified. He said that Jesus was not there – that He had risen and the tomb was empty!

I want to remind you that it was the women who God chose to be the first He told about the Resurrection. And after that He told them to "*Go and tell.*" I believe that God wants all of His children actively involved in His kingdom, and that includes His church, too. I am pleased to honor the ministry of women in this church – as Lay readers or lectors, as Lay Eucharistic Ministers, as Acolytes, and as the members of the Altar Guild who tirelessly prepare the church for the Holy Eucharist and decorate the church, as they have today – and other special celebrations in the life of this church.

To those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, death has lost its sting – it is no longer something to be feared. What fear is there when we have the promise that, because of the empty tomb, we will live forever with Our Lord in Heaven?

Have you ever thought about just why the tomb was empty? It was empty for one thing, because Jesus is alive. Remember what the angel told the women? He had risen! And the promise of that empty tomb is that we can also live after we die. We can live forever in Heaven, with God the Father, where we shall have the desire to worship Him with all of our love forever and ever.

In Luke's Gospel, in chapter 24, when Peter was told about the arisen Lord Jesus, he went to the tomb and there, he saw the strips of linen that Jesus had been buried in. This could have meant only one thing – Jesus Christ is alive!

There are many theories about what really happened. One thing they all have in common is this: None of them explain why there are so many documented proofs of His being seen after the fact. They all seem to say He died, and they just kind of ignore the rest of the story. But it is in the rest of the story that we find our hope of glory. It is the rest of the story that wraps

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everything up and ties it all together the way it should be. It is the rest of the story that tells how Jesus was seen by over 500 people, walking with them; talking with them; and eating with them.

Can you imagine the joy of the Apostles when saw Jesus again - alive? Here was a man they worshipped. Here was a man they genuinely loved – having learned so much from Him living with Him for 3 years. And here was a man who was killed and buried, taking Him away from the disciples. Can you imagine how they felt – the emptiness, the fear, the terror? But here He was again – right before them. Can you imagine the joy they felt? And the fact that He has risen should give all of us that same joy today. He has risen; He lives again; and it is the promise of the empty burial clothes that prove it. Christ is alive!

It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. That first Easter Sunday, as the women went to the grave, they had no idea what was about to happen to them. They were not yet aware of the wonderful promises of that day.

Off in the distance at Golgotha, stood an empty cross; that emptiness was the promise of forgiveness that their sins would be forgiven. They turned from the cross and went towards the tomb, just to find it empty, too. And, in the emptiness of the tomb, they found the promise of eternal life. Inside the tomb were the empty burial clothes, and it was in the emptiness of the burial clothes that they found they could still have the promise of personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

And if you choose, you can know the hope found in the emptiness of so long ago. You can find the promises Jesus offers you through the empty cross, the empty tomb, and the empty burial clothes. It is your choice to make today.

I need to ask you to answer this question honestly: Do you know Jesus Christ this morning? I did not ask you if you had heard about Him, I asked if you know Him. If you do not, don't you think you should? Jesus says in the Book of Revelation 3:20; "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*" Do you feel Him knocking at the door of your heart this morning? If you do, open the door, and welcome the Risen King of Glory into your life and your heart - ask Jesus to come into your heart – and welcome the new life and the hope of Resurrection into your life! May you have a truly Blessed Resurrection Day! Christ is Alive!