

Feast of the Resurrection – Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018, Year B

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

***“Empty”***

This morning we began our service by proclaiming “Alleluia, the Lord is Risen” and you responded, “The Lord is Risen Indeed – Alleluia!” Praise God - “HE HAS RISEN Jesus died, Jesus rose, and He promised to come and take us with Him, one day. The world teases us with all sorts of empty promises – but God blesses us with promises that He always keeps! There is NOT one promise that He has made throughout Scripture that HE did not keep, and He is still keeping them today! Just look around you – look at this marvelous building and what has already been done. Floors that were left vacant for seven years with all sorts of stuff on them, with plywood and rotting wood – are now solid once again! There are people who from day one – prayed that there would one day be an altar rail in this church – so that people would be able to kneel when they receive the body and blood of Jesus. Well, look! We are no longer using a borrowed altar – we are using an altar that was build with a remembrance from the “brick church.” An exact duplicate – (actually – we feel it is even better) than the one that burned and is in Rowan’s home. This graces our church and will continue to grace our church. There is a beautiful plaque on the back of the altar that gives the intentions. If you ever have a chance – you can check it out and give thanks. There are more things that are going to happen- keep coming and see them happen. Our Bishop is coming on April 15<sup>th</sup> – on that Sunday He is going to consecrate everything that is new. It will indeed be a glorious day. There will be singing, a celebration – it will be like a second Easter!

The world gives us promises that are full of emptiness, but on Easter Sunday - God gave us a special promises – and everything that is empty is full of His promises! There are three promises of Easter. Each promise is marked by emptiness:

- An empty cross;
- empty burial clothes;
- And praise the Lord - an empty tomb.

God’s promises are very, very, real – and they are not by any means empty - but filled with hope – eternal hope. Jesus went to the cross, suffered and then He arose from the tomb defeating the devil, sin and death. Every other religion in the world’s leaders remains are still in their tombs – but Jesus is not in His tomb – He is Risen!

The last 16 hours of Jesus’ life were filled with pain – physically and emotionally. Just this past Tuesday I was honored to preach for the Holy Week Lunchtime Service given by the Coffee County Ministerial Association – and my message was about the scourging at the pillar. Believe me that was one of the hardest messages to deliver – simply because of the sheer agony that Jesus endured – for me – and for you!

The Roman soldiers were trained professionals - masters of torture and death. They tortured Jesus with the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the uphill climb to Calvary – making Him carry His cross. These men were embarrassed when they found out the body was missing!

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When they found out that Jesus arose, they and the Temple leaders wanted to keep it quiet from the rest of the people - so they wouldn't realize that Jesus was indeed the Christ – the Messiah. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28, Jesus' accusers, the chief priests and elders paid the soldiers who were guarding the tomb and verse 13 which says, "*You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'*" An absolute lie that covered up the truth about Jesus, and Lord knows the world has been listening to that lie in one form or another ever since! Think about it, with all the authorities wanting Jesus dead, they would have arrested anyone in the city who even had anything to do with stealing Jesus' body. No matter what you may have heard in your life, there is proof that Jesus died on that cross. And, it was on that cross that Jesus actually defeated sin. The cross remains empty because that is where our sin disappeared, through Jesus Christ as our Savior. The tomb remains empty – as a sign of the hope that is offered by Jesus to believers – through His Resurrection.

Let's face it – there is nobody here in this church today that is perfect. We are all sinners – we have all made mistakes. Do you remember the TV show "Happy Days?" Fonzie? He had a problem – he could not say he was wrong. Holy Scripture tells us that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23) According to God's law, what you deserve when you sin – is to be put to death – "*the wages of sin is death.*" As sinners, we deserve to die and be condemned to hell for all eternity. But the Good News is that God does not want us to go there! That's why He sent Jesus to die; He allowed His mercy, grace, His love and forgiveness to let us be cleansed from sin so that we never have to go there.

The Bible tells us there is no other Name given under Heaven by which we can be saved; that Name is Jesus, Yeshua, the Messiah. Because the cross is empty, we have the full promise of eternal glory with God - fulfilled. The Prophet Isaiah 700 years before Jesus went to the cross - in 53:5 foretold "*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds (stripes) we are healed.*" Right there is God's plan for forgiveness for believers – for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities – for our sins – the punishment that was meant for us brought us peace instead – and by His wounds – His stripes – we are healed – physically, emotionally and spiritually. Today is filled with Good News - that forgiveness is available to you today – right here – right now – and it comes from Jesus! The debt has been paid – and all you need to do is believe. I have offered these 12 words to every couple that gets married – and I offer them to you today. These are words for every relationship – and for your relationship with Jesus Christ. The 12 words are: "I was wrong;" "I am sorry;" "Please forgive me;" "I love you." Twelve simple words - "I was wrong;" "I am sorry;" "Please forgive me;" "I love you." Think about it – that is what repentance is all about.

On that first Easter morning, just before dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, went to the tomb so they could finish the anointing of Jesus' body with spices and oils. Every step must have been filled with the sadness of the past few days. Their Lord, their King, their master was dead. When they got to the tomb entrance, they felt the earth shake.

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They were frightened, but they continued toward the tomb. When they got to the front of it, they were shocked to see the Roman soldiers unconscious and the stone wheel 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! In the empty tomb we find the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise to each and every one of us that we too will be raised to eternal life. If we believe!

Have you ever thought about just why the tomb was empty? It was empty 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. I believe that is great news.

But there is a third promise of emptiness on this Easter Day. In Luke's Gospel account in chapter 24, when Peter was told about the arisen Jesus, he went to the tomb, right then and there, he saw the strips of linen that Jesus had been buried in. This could have meant only one thing – Jesus is alive!

Can you imagine what the disciples felt when they saw Jesus again - alive? Here was a man they worshipped. Here was a man they truly loved – having learned from Him and lived with Him for 3 years. And here was a man who was tortured, killed and buried, taking Him away from His disciples. Can you imagine how they must have hurt?

But, here He was again – right before them. Can you imagine the incredible joy they felt? And the fact that He has risen should give all of us that same joy today. He has risen; Jesus Christ lives again; and it is the promise of the empty burial clothes that prove it.

It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. On 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 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. I cannot say that enough! Inside the tomb were the empty burial clothes, and it was in the emptiness of those 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.

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This morning, we have heard about three promises that God has given to us.

- Ask yourself - is God serious? I assure you that He is, indeed.
- Ask yourself – have you asked Jesus in to your heart? Let today be that day – and don't waste another minute!
- Then, ask God to forgive you and let His Risen Son come into your heart to change your life. Believe me, Jesus will begin a change, a transformation in you that you will see yourself a different person – for the better.

Jesus says in one of my favorite Bible verses from the Book of Revelation 3:20; *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”* This is an invitation that He is very serious about. Let today be the beginning of a wonderful relationship that will be everlasting. A relationship that is based on peace, hope and love. A relationship in which you will never be afraid to use the 12 words – “I was wrong;” “I am sorry;” “Please forgive me;” “I love you.” You will be free, forevermore – and I promise you – you will never be empty again.