

Title: Celebrating Fifty Days of Easter  
Date: 4/17/2022 (Easter Day)  
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Service: 9am and 11:15am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)  
Readings: [Acts 10:34-43](#); [1 Corinthians 15:19-26](#); [Luke 24:1-12](#); [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)  
Video Link: <https://youtu.be/g-fMpVLTsYs?t=1760>

The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.  
On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
(Ps 118 22-24)  
Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!  
(The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!)

It's so good to see all of you here. After forty days in the wilderness of Lent, it is finally, finally Easter. Not only are we celebrating Easter today, we will be celebrating it for the next fifty days, until the feast of Pentecost on June 5th. As a side note, our bishop Andy Doyle will be here that day, so if you want to be confirmed, or want to know what it means to be confirmed, please be in touch about the classes starting next week.

In case you were wondering if you heard me right, yes, I said that the season of Easter is fifty days long. Jesus spent forty days presenting himself to his disciples after his resurrection, convincing them that he was actually alive and telling them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Then after he ascended into heaven, it was another ten days before the Holy Spirit descended in dramatic fashion.

In my experience of church, we spend a lot of time talking about the forty days of Lent, but we don't spend nearly as much time talking about the fifty days of Easter. When it comes to Lent, we talk about giving up something or taking on something as a spiritual practice for Lent, and there are many many books filled with readings and prayers to guide us through those forty days. But when it comes to Easter, it's all about Easter Day, not so much the Easter season.

What would it look like to celebrate Easter for fifty days?

I'm not sure my body could take fifty days of Easter feasting. Being vegetarian means I can stay away from the hams and the lambs, but the desserts...those could become very dangerous very quickly. To be clear, I think it's great to have Easter traditions. It is right and proper to set aside TODAY as a very special day, to make an effort to wear special clothes and do special things with special people. At the same time, I wonder what it might look like to fully live into Easter as the season celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

It says something about us as humans that Jesus had to spend forty days convincing his disciples that he's really, truly alive. We tell the story of Thomas who doubted, and I bet he wasn't the only one. I don't blame them.

As we just heard from the gospel according to Luke, when the women went into the empty tomb, they couldn't find the body. They were perplexed. This was beyond their understanding. They already suffered the trauma of losing their beloved friend and teacher. They had brought with them spices and ointments for his body, and it seems cruel that someone would rob them of this chance to pay their final respects.

Then suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. They asked the women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Lk 24:1-5)

We are surrounded by all kinds of death. When someone breathes out for the final time, there is physical death. When we are overwhelmed by grief, we may feel like the walking dead. When we are weighed down by trauma or the midst of it, it can feel like hope is dead. When tragic news keep popping up on our phones throughout the day, every day, it feels like the world is stuck in an endless cycle, propelling itself toward a bad end. It feels like God is missing, if not dead, because we are looking for God in the tomb.

Back to the gospel. The two men reminded the women that Jesus himself told them back in Galilee "that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again" (Lk 24:6-7). Whether or not the women believed Jesus when he first said it, they must have had a hard time envisioning it. After all, they watched him take his last breath on the cross, they saw his body being laid in the tomb (Lk 23:49, 56).

Of course that's where they would go to look for him. They didn't know what we know.

They thought the political and religious authorities had won. The agents of the Roman Empire and the chief priests had crucified their Lord. They thought death was the end of the story. They thought Jesus' death put an end to their hopes for their life to be better, for their world to be different.

But death is not the end, not for Jesus. And because this was not the end for him, this is not the end for his disciples, or for us.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he writes, "[In] fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor 15:20-22).

After Jesus rose from the tomb, he spent forty days convincing his disciples that he was alive, AND telling them about the kingdom of God. In doing so, he reminded them that he is more powerful than the rulers and the authorities that crucified him. He reminded them that their kingdom is not this earthly kingdom; their kingdom is the kingdom of God, which is somehow both not yet here and already here (that's what we pray for when we pray "thy kingdom come.")

His very presence was a visible sign that God is more powerful than death.  
GOD wins. LIFE wins.

To be clear, the resurrection of Jesus doesn't erase death as a fact of life. Death, whether physical, emotional, spiritual, is still hard to face. I would be lying if I told you I wasn't afraid of death. I would be lying if I told you I was immune from grief and trauma and being overwhelmed by the heartbreaking things that keep happening. But the resurrection of Jesus tells me that death is not The End, capital T capital E and red velvet curtains that close.

The resurrection of Jesus tells me there is a way out of the tomb.

There is a way through death to life. Even if you and I cannot begin to imagine how we can possibly find a way through death and out of the tomb, we don't have to, because Jesus has already done that for us. All we have to do is follow him; all we have to do is follow the saints before us, the ancestors and wise people who have followed him through death and into new life.

One of those wise people is our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. He tells us that the way of God, as made visible to us through Jesus Christ, is loving, liberating, and life-giving.<sup>1</sup> It is loving, liberating, and lifegiving.

He suggests that we begin our day by asking "How could my words, actions and heart reflect the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus?" and end our day by asking, "When did I see myself **or others** being loving, liberating or life-giving today? Where do I wish I'd seen or practiced Jesus' Way?"

Practices like these help us practice resurrection. Then when we are inevitably faced with death or grief or trauma or all the heartrending things happening in this world, we already have experience with turning away from death and toward life. Instead of being stuck in the tomb, we follow the way out of the tomb toward the kingdom of God.

This is one way to live into the spirit of Easter.

Today, we celebrate that God, through Jesus Christ, "has overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life,"<sup>2</sup> This year, may Easter be for you and yours, and for us as a church, not just one joyous and glorious day of resurrection, but fifty.

I believe it will (!), with God's help, of course.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/jesus-movement/>

<sup>2</sup> Collect of the Day for Easter Sunday