

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Encountering Mystery”**  
**Easter Sunday**  
**Luke 24:1-12**  
**April 16, 2017**

Easter is always one of my favorite mornings. There’s just so much joy and excitement in the air. Of course there’s breakfast and the egg hunt. The flowers in here are like an explosion of color. The music has extra energy.

Not to mention, that standing up here, looking out,  
you guys just look better on Easter.

Let’s be honest, some of you are wearing something brand new you picked out for today, aren’t you?

After six weeks of Lent and fasting, we’ve been looking forward to this day, and it’s just such a joy to wake up this morning and know Lent is over and Easter has arrived.

But as I was reading the story of the resurrection from Luke this week, I was struck by how different that first Easter morning was.

We know what to expect when we come here Easter morning, but for all those on that day, this was the last thing they expected.

For us, there’s something so bright and clear and confident about today.  
For them, that day was full of confusion and... distrust even.

We wake up with a bit of extra energy and delight today,  
but for them, they were drained and numb.

Most of us read our litany earlier in the service knowing that this is what you say on Easter morning. So when you hear, “Christ is risen!” We know to respond, “He is risen indeed!”

But when the disciples hear, “Christ is risen!” they reply, “You wish, now leave me alone.”

They don’t believe the women, and let’s be honest; you and I probably wouldn’t have believed them either.

The whole story here in Luke reminds me of the way breaking news tends to happen. Things start flying around Twitter and Facebook. You know something has happened, but the reports are conflicting and confusing. One network picks up the story. Another network corrects this story.

It’s a little bit of news,  
a little bit of hysteria,  
and a whole lot of cloudy confusion over what is actually going on.

The women are confused to see the tomb empty. They are told by some mysterious messengers that Jesus has risen from the dead. They’re afraid at first, but then they start remembering some things Jesus has said.

So they run off to tell all the disciples, and you can imagine how that sounded, all of them talking at once, trying to get the details right.

“You’re not going to believe this...

“We got there and we saw the linen.

“And the tomb.

“And there were these messengers.”

“Because the stone was moved.”

And the disciples are thinking, “Wait, what are you saying?”

And maybe Mary Magdalene says it. “Jesus. He’s alive.”

Luke says it sounded to them like an idle tale. So you can imagine the response on their faces. Skeptical frowns, probably.

“Did you actually see Jesus?” they asked.

“Well no, but come on guys, you have to come and see the tomb for yourselves!”

Most of the disciples turned and walked away. They didn’t believe them. Sounds like “fake news” ... of the first degree. They certainly weren’t singing hymns, confessing faith, or putting on their best clothes to celebrate.

Not only did they **not** wake up that morning with joy stirring in their hearts the way some of us did, knowing the celebration that was about to take place, they didn’t believe the news when they heard it, and they spent most of the day not believing the rumors that the women had started.

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I know that even though **we** are gathered here in this room today, singing these hymns, wearing our Easter best, there are many of us for whom this story doesn’t make any sense either. As confident as our singing sounds, there are still a whole lot of questions, and a whole lot of mystery that *makes Easter not only the best day of the year, but also the hardest day of the year.*

We might look put together on the outside, but inside some of us are full of questions and confusion... and even... gut wrenching doubts.

If you’re in that place and feeling a bit isolated today, let me give you some good news. You are not alone. ***Jesus’ closest friends are in it with you.***

We know this is a hard mystery to swallow. It has always been a hard mystery to swallow, even since the very first Easter morning.

And I could try to explain a bit more of it to you.

I could try to explain that no one is saying Jesus came back to life just in just the exact same way that you and I are alive here and now.

I could point out that in the stories, Jesus’ resurrected body is both similar and different than our bodies...

how on the one hand, you could see the scars from his wounds, you could touch him, and he ate food, and he was very physical,  
but on the other hand, he was often unrecognizable, he appeared and disappeared inside locked rooms.

Somehow he's both similar and different from our bodies now.

I could also try to explain to you that Einstein's theory of special relativity gives some glimpse into the possibility of all this. Einstein showed that energy, when it is compressed, can become matter, and matter, can become energy...

and maybe that relationship between energy and matter, and the way they can go back and forth from one to another, gives us a glimpse into the mystery of Jesus' resurrected body.

We could sit down and try to wrap our minds around this all day, but even then I know that it would all remain fuzzy at best.... Because... ***you cannot think your way into this mystery.***

In fact, ultimately that's how it always is with God. ***You can't think your souls way into God...*** Your mind can get you started, and yes you need to use it, but it can't take you all the way there... any more than the disciples could think their way into resurrection joy on Easter day.

Sure, the rumors got them curious and confused, but the way all the gospel writers tell us this story, it's pretty clear they needed more than an empty tomb. The only thing that broke open the mystery of Easter for them

was an encounter with Jesus...

an encounter with resurrected life,

an encounter that happened later that night.

The disciples are all gathered in a room that night, and the confusion is growing and rumors are growing. And as the confusion is coming to a peak, Jesus suddenly appears among them for the first time. Luke says they are startled and terrified. That's probably the biggest understatement in the Bible.

Jesus says to them, ***"Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself; touch me and see."***

And they did. Jesus is very physically present with them. And as they begin to encounter this resurrected presence, the fog begins to clear. Joy begins to break in on them.

But Luke says that even in their joy, "they were disbelieving and still wondering." Even then, they were disbelieving and still wondering."

In other words, ***they could not wrap their minds around what they were experiencing.***

And just like the disciples, you and I... we're never going to be able to fully wrap our minds around it.

The Easter invitation isn't to *understand* the resurrection.

The Easter invitation is to *encounter* the resurrected one.

Because it's in that encounter of Jesus that the fog begins to roll away and we are being transformed. It's in encountering the resurrected one that we are being changed,  
that our despair moves toward hope,

that we are moved from our isolation and loneliness  
toward community and communion.

In the encounter with the resurrected one, our minds are moved past their limitations and past their struggles from trying so hard to understand.

Toward surrendering ourselves to love and life that is right there in front of us.

When we encounter Jesus we may still not understand Easter.

But there, face to face with the mystery of God before us, we are carried over into the place of unknowing. The place of unknowing,

where something profound within us, and around us, is opened up to the mystery beyond naming, into the life of God beyond us,

where all is joy,

and all is love,

and all life is playfully dancing around us.

We are carried over into that place.

So as much as we want to understand the empty tomb, what you and I need most isn't another explanation, what we need today... and in the days and weeks to come, ***is an encounter with Jesus.***

"Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself; touch me and see."

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Of course, if you've spent much time looking at all for Jesus, then you know finding him isn't all that easy. He can be hard to find when you're wandering around lost in the fog of your life. And honestly, he's even harder to find when you think your life is all perfectly put together.

So I want to offer you some of the ancient wisdom that the church has picked up over the last couple thousand years, of keeping an eye out for Jesus.

***First***, chances are you're not going to recognize him out on your own. When you read the stories of people encountering the resurrected Christ, you start to notice that pattern. When he appears to just one person, or two people, it takes a long time before they recognize that it is him... standing there... talking to them. But when he appears to all of them gathered together, they begin to recognize right away.

So your best bet is to hang out with the rest of us disciples. Not because we have this all figured out, but simply because, for some reason or another, when the disciples are all gathered together we're more likely to recognize him.

I imagine that it is because you can see what I cannot see, and I can see what you cannot see, and the mystery of Christ is way too beautiful and big for any of us to recognize on our own.

I'd also guess it's because some days your heart just isn't open, and some days my heart just isn't open. So on the days your heart is closed and all this starts to sound like an idle tale, then I will believe for you. And on the days when my heart is closed, I hope you'll believe for me and help me to see him... when he's right here among us.

One way or another, when we're all together,

we're a whole lot more likely to encounter the resurrected Christ than when we are off on our own.

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A second bit of ancient wisdom that the church has picked up, is that we're more likely to **encounter Jesus at the table**. The Gospel of Luke is full of stories where Jesus is at the table. Apparently, Jesus loved a good dinner party. And so the people in his day often pictured him with a glass of wine in his hands and joy in his eyes.

He loved to celebrate life.

And so the Church has learned that one of the best places for us to encounter Jesus is at this banquet he has prepared for us. It's why we keep coming back to this table.

The body that was broken becomes the bread of life.  
The blood that was spilled becomes the joyous cup of Salvation.

Here at this table, we encounter the risen Christ.  
Here we encounter the mystery beyond our ability to comprehend.  
We may not all recognize him, but he's here.  
His life is here.  
Joy is here  
Hope is here... offered to you.

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So this morning, you're going to be invited to come and receive from this table, and when you do, I want to invite you to come with your questions, with all the foggiess of your life,  
and as you take the bread, and dip it into the cup,  
and take it deep inside your body,  
know that you are being fed by the life of God,  
and in that moment, allow yourself to be carried over into the mystery of resurrected life.

And as you are carried over, I want to invite you to take a flower, as a symbol of that resurrected life, and place it at the cross. The cross of our need, the cross of our confusion, the cross of our pain, the cross of God's love that has been poured out for you.

In order to do that,  
In order to prepare ourselves to enter this mystery joy,  
I want to invite you to take your worship guide in hand and to stand with me now as we sing together.

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The bread of life is here.

The cup of salvation is here for all who are hungry for the life of God,  
for all who long to encounter the resurrected Christ.

You're invited to come and receive.

And after you do, I want to invite you to take one of our carnations, and place it at the cross, where God's mysterious power and love has been revealed,  
the place where God turns death into life.

Come now, as you're ready.