

“And I Hope...”  
Luke 24:1–12  
Sunday, March 31, 2024 (Easter Sunday)

Let us pray: Risen and ever-living Lord, raise up your word in us, that it might lead us to new life, in Christ. Amen.

Almost 100 years ago, a physicist named Erwin Schrodinger came up with a thought experiment referred to as “Schrodinger’s Cat.” The basic idea is that if you put a cat in a sealed box with something that can kill it, you won’t know if the cat is alive or dead until you open the box. There is a 50% chance that the cat is dead, and there is a 50% chance that the cat is alive. So, until you open the box and observe the cat, the cat is *simultaneously dead and alive*. It is both at the same time. You might say, “That’s impossible. The cat is either dead *or* it is alive, but it can’t be both,” to which Schrodinger would respond, “But until you open the box, you don’t know, so it *is* both.” It is a paradox. Both things are true at the same time.

And there have been all these interpretations of it throughout the years, attempts to explain it and understand it and answer this question of, “When does it stop being *both* and become one or the other?” Some interpretations say it’s when it is *observed*, but some say it has to be observed by a *conscious* observer (like you and me), while others say it can be observed by a device. Some interpretations say, “No, the cat is either alive or it is dead, whether anyone sees it or not.” There’s an interpretation called *Wigner’s Friend*, where a physicist named Eugene Wigner said that if a friend opens the box and observes the cat but doesn’t *tell* anyone, the friend becomes a *part* of the function and has seen both a live cat and a dead cat. There is one interpretation called the “Many Worlds Theory” that says once the cat is observed, a *split* occurs, where in *one* world the observer sees a *living* cat, while in *another* world the observer sees a *dead* cat, and both exist

independent of each other. There is one interpretation that looks at it from the *cat's* point of view.

It has to do with quantum mechanics and something called quantum superposition and the behavior of atoms and all these other things that you didn't come to church on Easter to hear about. But with all these complex interpretations, here is the question that interests me: What do you *want* it to be? Do you want the cat to be alive, or do you want the cat to be dead? And you might say, "Of course I want it to be alive! Who in the world would *want* the cat to be dead?" But I'm sure we all know people who, maybe they don't *want* the cat to be dead, but they're pretty sure it *is*. What do you *want* it to be?

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Enough talk about dead cats on Easter; that's not the point. I was *thinking* about it because it reminds me so much of what happened on the *first* Easter. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, a woman named Joanna, and some other women went to Jesus' tomb to care for his body. When they get there, the stone has been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, and Jesus' body is not there. Suddenly two men appear and tell them, "He is not here but has risen." But they don't actually *see* Jesus. They don't actually *know* if he has risen and is alive, or if he is still dead and someone just took his body.

The women run back and tell the disciples what has happened, but the disciples don't believe them. They thought it was just "an idle tale." It was nonsense. They thought the women were crazy. Because Jesus is either dead or he is alive, and they *saw* him die. You can't be dead and alive at the same time. That's crazy. But, it says, Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He looked inside and saw the linen cloths that Jesus had been wrapped in, but he didn't see Jesus. All he saw was an empty tomb.

An empty tomb can either be *bad news*, or it can be *good news*. The *bad news* is that Jesus is gone. Someone might have stolen his body, but he is still dead. The *good news* is the possibility that Jesus might actually be *alive*. “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again. Remember? He *told you* that this was going to happen.” But until they actually *see* Jesus, they don’t know whether this is *good news* or *bad news*. The question is, what do they *want* it to be?

What did *Peter* want it to be? Why did he get up and run to the tomb? Was it because he thought Jesus’ body had been stolen, and he needed to go see for himself and maybe *find* him? Or was it because maybe – just *maybe* – Jesus had risen, like he said, and he is *alive*? Does an empty tomb mean that hope is *gone* and *lost*? Or does it mean that hope is *alive*?

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There’s a funny thing about that word *hope*. When the Jewish people talked about hope, they used the Hebrew word *qavah*. It means, “to wait,” but it’s not just a *passive* waiting around for something to happen. It’s an *active* waiting, “to *look* for something, to *expect* something, to *anticipate* something.” The same word is also used to talk about a *cord* that binds or ties two things together. So for them, hope was about waiting for something, expecting something in such a way that you are bound to it.

In the New Testament, when it talks about hope, they use the Greek word *elpis*. And *elpis* can mean two very different things. It can mean, “the expectation of *good*,” or it can mean, “the expectation of *evil*.” It depends on the context. The expectation of *good* is *hope*. The expectation of *evil* is *fear*. When you are expecting something bad to happen, that is *fear*. What

this word shows us is that *hope* and *fear* can *both* be present at the same time. The *difference* is in what you are *expecting*. And that's where hope is most powerful – when you are faced with the prospect of something *bad*, but in the midst of that, you are bound to the expectation of something *good*.

Hope is the *possibility* of good news, not the *reality* of it. Peter still does not know whether Jesus is alive or dead. *Hope* is not about what is *true*. All Peter knows is true here is that Jesus is *gone*. *Hope* is about what we *want* to be true; what we *need* to be true. What did Peter *need* to be true? Whatever it was, *that* is what made him run; *that* is what he was running *to*. What do *we* need to be true, because that is what *we* will run to.

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When we look at our lives and at the world around us, we don't always see a lot of *proof* that Christ is risen. We see pain and sadness and sickness and suffering and injustice and oppression and violence and vengeance and destruction and death. We see a lot that leads us to expect the *bad*; a lot of *fear*. But remember, *hope* and *fear* can *both* be present at the same time. And where hope is most powerful is when you are faced with the prospect of something *bad*, but in the midst of that, you are holding on to the possibility of something *good*.

When a ship crashes into a bridge, and they are looking for survivors in the water, what is your expectation? “Oh, they're not going to find anyone,” or, “Maybe they *will*...”

When we look at Gaza and Ukraine, what is your expectation? “They will never find a way to live together, and this violence is never going to stop,” or, “Maybe they *can*...”

Hope does not ignore the possibility of the *bad*. It just holds on to the possibility of the *good*.  
It's all about what you *need* to be true and what you *choose* to hold on to.

I can look at the fiercely divided political culture around us, where friends are turning against friends, and family is turning against family, and it seems so impossible to overcome. And I hope...

Someone I love can receive a difficult medical diagnosis that does not look good. And I hope...

I can watch someone struggling with addiction or depression or mental illness relapse over and over again. And I hope...

I can see all of the statistics that show the decline of the church or of faith in general, more and more people leaving the church or choosing not to identify with any organized religion. I know the long-term implications of that. And I hope...

I saw a presentation the other week on modern day slavery and how many people around the world are currently living in some form of slavery. Fifteen or twenty years ago, it was around 20 million people, and since then so much awareness has been raised, and so much money and legal resources have been poured into fighting it. And in this presentation, they said that the current number is around *50 million people* living in slavery. It has more than *doubled*. And I hope...

I see the epidemic of gun violence in America, and it seems like we're just biding our time until the next mass shooting, and no one is willing to do anything about it. And I hope...

I look at a friend whose family is struggling, and nothing is getting better, in fact it's getting *worse*. Nothing they are doing is working. And I hope...

I can look at a broken relationship where forgiveness seems impossible. And I hope...

I look at the Phillies' bullpen. And I hope...

I can mourn the death of someone I love. And I hope...

And all of that is because I look at the empty tomb, and I hope. I wasn't *there*. I didn't *see it*. I have no *evidence* that it happened. I cannot *prove* it to you. And I hope. Because I *need* it to be true. I *need* Christ to be risen. The only way that I can live in this world with any degree of hope for the future is not because I trust in myself and my own abilities. I don't always get it right. It's not because I trust in the innate goodness of human beings and our ability to make the world better. We don't see a whole lot of proof of that right now. It is because I believe that sin and death and evil will not have the last word in this world and in our lives, because Jesus Christ has *overcome* them through his death and resurrection.

And I hope that resurrection is not just something that *happened* 2,000 years ago, or that *will happen* one day after we die, but that it is something that *happens* today. That Jesus brings life where there is death. That he is at work healing this broken world and our broken lives. That he makes *all things, even us*, new. And he gives us everything that we need to keep on living, even in the midst of death.

One way or the other, the tomb is empty. It's either because he's still dead, or it's because he is alive. What do you *want* it to be? What do you *need* it to be? What is the good news that you

*need* to be true? I run to the empty tomb with Peter because I hope that Jesus is alive and that I will meet him there and that he will raise me up to new life, too. I run there with fears and doubts, and sometimes I stumble over them, but hope does not eliminate our fears and doubts, it just chooses to hold on to the possibility of something *better*. Of *good news*. And what this world needs right now is more people holding on to the possibility of *good news*. That is what we are called to be as followers of the one who said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who trust in me, even though they die, will *live*. And everyone who lives and trusts in me will *never die*.”

The tomb is empty, and I *hope* – I *trust* – it is because Christ is alive. He is risen, and he raises us up to new life, too. Hold on to that possibility – *run* to it – and you will find the hope that you need to live in this world, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.