

April 21, Resurrection of the Lord (Luke 24:1-12)

The resurrection is an old, old message. But I need to be reminded.

by [April Yamasaki](#) in the [April 21, 2019](#) issue

It was Easter Sunday, and I was both joyful and terrified. As a brand new pastor, I had moved into the church office just that week. A lay minister had already been scheduled to preach, but he had phoned to say that since the church had affirmed my call, he would step aside. “It’s important for you to be visible,” he said. “People need to see that something is happening.”

I could see his point, yet I had a million other things to attend to that first week, and I wondered how I could possibly prepare a sermon too. Especially on such short notice. Especially when I wasn’t yet used to my new role. Especially for Easter Sunday.

That Sunday the choir sang, and a young couple played the parts of Mary Magdalene and Peter bearing witness to their encounters with the risen Christ. I preached on John 20:1–18. I spoke of Mary’s tears, and how even the sight of angels could not stop her weeping. Only when she finally recognized Jesus did her tears of deep grief turn into a cry of joy.

Since that Easter Sunday, I have celebrated 25 more Easter Sundays as a pastor with that same congregation. Now instead of a choir and congregational singing from a hymnal, worship songs are projected on screen and led by a worship team. There’s always a story for the children, or a special song or prayer with them, unless there’s some kind of dramatic presentation instead. I have sermon slides to go with my sermon.

On some Easter Sundays we’ve tried something new, like placing flowers on the cross. This past Easter we added beautiful sari cloth over the windows to color the daylight as if through stained glass.

I love experimenting with these creative expressions of worship. But while the way we worship has changed over the years, the message has stayed essentially the same: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! It's an old, old message, and yet it bears repeating year after year after year. For just like Jesus' first disciples, we too need to be reminded.

In Luke 9, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" When Peter answers, "the Messiah of God," Jesus tells them of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection (vv. 18-22). After healing a child and returning him to his father, Jesus again predicts that he will be betrayed and executed (vv. 37-45). Later, Jesus gives his disciples a more detailed account of what's to come (18:31-34). Peter and the other disciples hear all three of Jesus' predictions, yet by the time the women tell them about the empty tomb, they have apparently forgotten. They don't believe the women's testimony that Jesus has risen from the dead.

The women don't remember Jesus' predictions at first, either. Perhaps the shock has numbed their senses, for they too need to be reminded by the two figures in dazzling robes they find in place of Jesus' body. "Remember how he told you," the angels say. "Then they remembered his words."

Perhaps when Jesus tried earlier to tell them what was going to happen, the prospect of his suffering and death was too horrible for them to grasp, the thought of his resurrection too impossible. Perhaps the disciples were too concerned with the crowd's opinions, or too preoccupied with who among them would be the greatest. They needed to be reminded.

So do we. Yet, we might protest, how could we possibly forget? The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus happened centuries ago. Those events have been studied and preached and sung over and over. The good news is old news. Of course we remember. We know it like we know today's date or that five times nine equals 45. A lot of us know the Apostles' Creed by heart: "our Lord . . . was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again."

But do we know and remember the death and resurrection of Jesus so profoundly that they shape the way we live each day? I confess I need to be reminded.

When someone has deeply wronged me, yet refuses to take responsibility for their actions and ignores the brokenness between us, I need to be reminded that Jesus was wronged too—and that even his wrongful death was not the end of the story.

Instead, he rose in triumph with new life and with healing in his wings. When I have wronged someone else and am dismayed at my own willfulness and lack of care, when I wish I could take something back but it's too late, instead of endlessly berating myself I need to be reminded that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean forgiveness for all of my failings. By the power of his Spirit, I receive grace upon grace upon grace to make amends and start again.

When I look at the world around me in dismay and sometimes even disgust, when ignorance and brutality seem to rule the day, I need to be reminded that this is the world created and loved by God—and that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to reconcile this world to himself.

So however we might celebrate Easter this year—whether we're joyful or terrified, facing new uncertainty or the challenge of staying in one place—I hope we can remember and proclaim that old, new message once more. Amid the challenges of daily living, it remains our joyful proclamation: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!