

Peter Wiley
 Easter
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He is Risen! (He is risen indeed!) Alleluia!

Easter. It came earlier this year. Maybe you saw an article about this. Is anyone here older than 94? Then Easter this year is earlier than any of us have ever experienced. And none of us will see it this early again. The next time Easter will be on March 23rd is the year 2228. In fact, it is only possible for it to be one day earlier – March 22. Last time that happened was 1818. Next time will be 2285.

Easter found a way to sneak up on me this year. It just seems too early. And that's significant, because while Easter is an event, a moment in time nearly 2000 years ago, Easter doesn't really take hold for us today unless we live it.

That's the question people of faith are challenged with every day:

Do we live in the same old world?

In that place where nothing has changed?

Where everything today is just like it was yesterday and tomorrow holds no new promise? Where hope is for the foolish and living as if there is a better way is naïve?

Or do we live as if Easter has already taken hold?

In a new world where tomorrow is only restrained by the limits of our imaginations?

Where the past is our history but holds no chains or restraints on the possibility of our tomorrow?

That's the question for people of faith. Are we people forever limited by the past failings of our own and the world . . . or are we Easter people, people of the empty tomb where the past is able to be put behind us and we are freed to take hold of a new future?

That's the fundamental question for people of faith today.

Easter. I received an email with a story about a man and a woman, Jim and Joan, who were having problems in their relationship and were giving each other the silent treatment. Two days into this contest of wills, Jim realizes that he needs his wife to wake him at 5 a.m. so that he can meet his friends for a golf game. Not wanting to give in and be the first to break the silence and lose the war, Jim slyly finds a solution and writes on a piece of paper:

Please wake me at 5 a.m. so I can play golf.

The next morning Jim wakes up at 9 a.m. long after his friends have started playing. He's furious. Just before he goes downstairs to see why his wife didn't wake him, he notices a piece of paper on the night stand. The paper reads: *It's 5 a.m., WAKE UP!*

The email finished with this observation:

Men are simply not equipped for these kinds of contests.

Well maybe . . . and maybe not. The real question is whether we should be fighting these sorts of fights in the first place. If you don't hold much hope for a new and different future, you might as well get ready for the battle. But . . . but if you believe that something new and better is possible – if you believe in the new world view – then you live as if it were so. You don't get bogged down in the old. You live in the new.

Obviously Easter is much bigger than a husband and wife's argument – but Easter even invades something that small, too. Easter is about the whole of our being and how we live our lives. Are we still stuck in the tombs of old? Or has the stone been rolled away, freeing us to live in the new?

Twelve years ago the associated press ran a story out of Vancouver with a headline reading: *Tears Turn to Laughter as Dead Couple Returns*, the story told of a couple whose little airplane crashed into a remote lake. If you've ever traveled north of Vancouver you know everything is remote. The crash left an oil slick and the couple's possessions all floating eerily on the water's surface, their bodies drowned and disappeared. As their obituaries were written and funeral plans were finalized, a coroner was flown to the crash site days later to make a final report. And there, he found something quite amazing. On the shore of the lake, a full quarter mile's swim from where the plane had made its fiery nose-dive, was the stranded couple. They were living on fresh water mussels and waving their thinning arms into the wilderness air to attract attention of anyone who might fly by. They never gave up hope, and found it in a coroner looking for death. (“Tears turn to laughter as dead couple returns,” associated press story quoted by Lillian Daniel in, “You Are Grounded,” *Journal for Preachers*, Easter 2004, p. 20)

Remember? That's what the women in the Easter story were asked at the tomb: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Jesus' resurrection -- the Easter story -- is about new life. About an empty tomb with the stone rolled away. A vacant cross. A risen savior. About new life and possibility. Not about death and being stuck in the past.

About what is still ahead.

It's about the possible and new dreams and visions.

That's the question asked of people of faith on Easter. Are we looking for the living among the dead? Or are we looking out to that which will still be? Are we stuck in an unchangeable past – fixed in a tomb? Or are we living into and taking hold of that new promised reality?

That's what we've been doing here this Lent.

We have been living into Easter.

In our church during Lent we've been focusing on taking on faithful practices instead of getting stuck in that old practice of giving something up.

Over these last six weeks we've reflected on:

1. care for ourselves . . . because our lives themselves are gifts of God.
2. leave a softer footprint on creation . . . because we've been entrusted with the care of the world.
3. using our time faithfully, fully and giving it to others . . . because each second of our days is a gift of God to be well used.

4. care for each other by sharing that which matters most to us and gives us sustenance because God calls us to love each other.
5. and we've been challenged these past six weeks to practice using the money given to us and to grow it for God . . . because everything we have is in fact a sacred trust from God.

We've done all these things this Lent, because the real way to experience Easter isn't to wait for it to come to you, but to live it. To believe in it. To be a part of it. And to make it so again and again.

Six weeks ago, those of us who were in church the first Sunday of Lent were each given fifty dollars and the children of the church ten dollars, with the challenge to live with it, risk it, and make it grow for God. In just a few minutes we're going to receive some of that money back. If you received one of the purple envelopes six weeks ago and are prepared to return it in its new form, as we sing "Thine is the Glory" I invite you to come forward and place it in one of the baskets up front (the children should place theirs in the basket with the baby blanket.)

These gifts and their growth are some of those symbols of what it means to live as Easter people. Of course we realize that only a small portion of the people here this morning have been a part of this Lenten endeavour . . . and yet, for all of us, it's a celebration of what it means to live as Easter people.

So, why would we care about a 2000 year old story about a man out of nowhere who stirred the powerful and inspired the needy and the lowly so much that they killed him on a cross? Because it's a story of life, not death – of hope, not despair – of the promise of what is still to be. That's why we live Easter. Not just this Sunday, but next week and the week after that.

Why would we care? Because we're an Easter people. And we seek to live it . . . and that's why, 2000 years later, we say:

"He is Risen!" (He is risen indeed). Yes we say, "He is Risen."