



We are gathered together not to celebrate the empty tomb but to celebrate life made possible because we can move beyond that empty tomb.

John Holbert reminds us that “Easter is not about resuscitation of a corpse. It is about the God who has loved us with an everlasting love.”¹

Our faith is about the resurrection – not the crucifixion.

Yes, the empty tomb is important because it marks- tangibly- God’s doing a new thing.

People saw Jesus call Lazarus from the dead.

No one saw God call Jesus from the dead.

And Peter, having seen the empty tomb, went home – amazed at what had happened.

Without the resurrection, Jesus would most likely be a footnote in history- another person put to death for challenging the Roman Empire and the other authorities of his day.

The resurrection is the pivot point: that which fundamentally changes who we are and how we understand God and our place in God’s realm.

It’s about how we respond to God now that God has shown us that life is possible even in the face of death and the loss of all we held dear and the changing of what we thought life was about.

Nothing is the same once we accept the resurrection as God’s “yes” to the world’s “no.”

Paul brings this home in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

For as death came through humans, so life comes through belief in Christ Jesus.

Christ is the first fruit – a concept well-known to the Israelites from the book of Deuteronomy.

We remember this as well when the offerings are brought forward and we say “All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”

First fruits are a tangible, visible reminder that all that we have and all that we are comes from God.

¹ John Holbert. Feasting on the Word. Yr. A, vol. 2. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 355.

Acts 10:34-43; Ps. 118;1-2, 14-24; 1 Cor. 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12

The bringing of your first fruits to the temple of God was a reminder that God deserves the best that we are and that we have- not the leftovers, not the spotted almost inedible bananas or the other things we might donate to the poor because the couch springs are shot or the dress has a tear or the shirt has a stain that we can't get out.

God gives us all; how can we give less than the best to the one who gives us life?

Jesus is the first fruit because Jesus dedicated his life to serving God and was unblemished by the values of the world.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to some, we are told by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, so that those to whom Jesus appeared would be witnesses of the power of God to overcome the sin of the world.

Change isn't easy.

Sometimes we are dragged kicking and screaming into a new reality.

The cross outside has been empty all week, symbolizing the stripping away of what the world values- and the power of greed and other sins to break a human body.

Its bare wood and size a reminder that God can strip away all that we hold of value.

Jesus hung on a cross so that God could raise him to new life as an example of what is possible.

Yesterday afternoon we began to decorate that tree with butterflies.

Butterflies come from caterpillars.

If you've ever watched the process, you know that caterpillars come to a point in their life where they stop and begin spinning a chrysalis- a cocoon that envelopes them completely. They remain in this cocoon sleeping and changing even though we can't see it.

The chrysalis appears to be dead- an ugly thing, of no value. Unless you knew what was possible, you would throw it away with an "ick."

Then go inside and scrub your hands.

But, if you know it's a chrysalis, and you have some idea of what's going on inside, you that, when the time is right, the creature inside twists and turns and finally breaks open that chrysalis and emerges as a butterfly. A beautiful creature.

But a new butterfly must remain attached to the cocoon for a bit with wings slowly pumping to get their circulation going.

And then when it's the right time, they fly away, leaving their empty tomb.

If we're lucky, we see butterflies in our gardens – wonderfully bright and graceful creatures that help to pollinate so that our gardens can grow and flourish.

The women who went to the tomb to perform one last service to their Lord found the remains of a human life.

As the two men in dazzling clothes asked them: why do you look for the living among the dead? The tomb is empty: it has served its purpose.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us a roadmap for how we might live today as disciples of Jesus Christ.

They were faced with an entirely new world-view.

Jesus, the man they had followed and believed in, was no longer physically present with them. They had the empty tomb- but if that was all they had, it really means little.

Martin Copenhaver writes that realities about which we harbor no doubt are not big enough to reveal God to us. ...Easter is the place of greatest doubt and the place of greatest truth. "There is no death so dead that God cannot find life in it. Easter is not about a magic act. Jesus does not just pop out of God's top hat as the awesome climax of a divine show. Easter is about the sort of God we worship, a God who will always have the last laugh, even in the face of that old dog, death."²

Just as God breathed life into the dust that God then shaped into humankind, God breathes life into us if we are willing to receive that breath.

We can choose to turn aside from that life-giving breath.

Or we can choose to accept it and then be witnesses to the power of God to bring life out of death.

To be witnesses that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

As we gather around the altar, we have another visible reminder that we are a community.

We do not always agree, but we can be there for one another.

We can be united in our reminder to the world that life is about more than an empty tomb.

Life is about the God that loved us so much that God sent the only begotten Son so that we might have eternal life.

Like those first apostles, we, too are called to shout out that "Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia. Alleluia."

² Id. Martin Copenhaver, 374.