

**Easter 2025**  
**Christ Collides with Death**  
Luke 24:1-12

Good Easter Morning! My name is Christina Reimer and I am one of the pastors of this church. You are all most welcome here as we celebrate the joy of the risen Christ together.

This sermon marks the last in our Lenten series “Christ Collides.” The theme for this week is “Christ Collides with Death.” Through Christ, death does not have the final word. In fact, Christ’s very being is synonymous with all that is life-giving. Yet Jesus also died. This is a part of his story. He did not simply ascend into heaven without having first experienced death. He was fully human and for this to be true, he had to cross the threshold of death like we all do.

On Friday, we held two church services here to commemorate Jesus’ journey to the cross where he suffered, died, and was then buried. And today we rejoice in his resurrection from the dead. But in between Friday and Sunday there is a pause. A liminal time between the moment of death and life.

The word “liminal” comes from the Latin “limen” meaning “threshold.” I invite you to think of this time between death and new life as crossing a sort of threshold. In his 1909 book *Rites of Passage*, anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep defines liminality as a transition stage in which our identity and our understanding of life’s meaning changes. These changes are confusing and challenge our preconceived notions, but it is also a time full of new possibilities. Liminality is a kind of uncharted “no man’s land” that must be traversed to get from one’s starting point at home to one’s future destination, wherever that may be. But a no man’s land is also a place where no one has ever been. That is part of the Easter story.

Luke’s account about the time between the crucifixion and the resurrection describes the story of a man named Joseph of Arimathea who goes to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so that he can give it an honorable burial in a tomb where no one else has been laid. He wraps the body lovingly in linen cloth, as is the Jewish custom. And then, Luke 23:54-56 reads:

It was the day of Preparation and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with [Joseph] from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how [Jesus’] body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. [But] on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

The liminal time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is the Sabbath day, a day of rest and reflection. The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word *sabat*, meaning to stop or cease. During this particular Sabbath, Jesus’ followers have stopped what they are doing to mourn the crucifixion of their friend and the one they believed to have been the Son of God. They aren’t just mourning a person. They are mourning their dashed expectations about who Jesus was and the great things he was going to do. On this Sabbath day, his followers probably questioned everything they thought they knew, wondering how this tragedy could have happened. Did they now doubt that Jesus could have been the Messiah at all if he was killed in such a way? I don’t think we give the significance of Holy Saturday enough attention before we jump to the joy of resurrection.

Many years ago, when I was in graduate school at the University of Toronto, I was taking a theology course with only one other student in the class. One day, we were waiting for our professor and found out that our lecture had been cancelled, so we decided to go to the cinema instead and ended up watching one of the *Mission Impossible* movies. If you know this film franchise, it is exactly how it sounds. Lots of action, lots of implausible scenarios, and lots of fun. In one scene, Tom Cruise, the main actor, is running at top speed from some kind of missile and he collides head on with a racing car. Then he jumps right back up and keeps running still dodging missiles. At this point in the movie, my friend leaned over to me, shook his head in disbelief, and whispered: “that’s so unrealistic.” This made me laugh. Of course it was unrealistic! That’s the point! Had my friend expected a literal representation of real life in an action movie?

The philosopher poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the term “suspension of disbelief” in 1817. He meant that we can set aside our notions about what is realistic or reasonable in a story for the sake of enjoyment or to appreciate its beauty and deeper meaning. Coleridge also refers to this as “poetic faith,” when the mind is stimulated despite the apparent irrationality of the story. When we watch fantastical movies or read magical books like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* perhaps, we know that they didn’t actually happen in a factual sense, but they produce real feelings in us and stimulate meaning that can transform our outlook on life and our path moving forward in very real ways. So, yes, they are real. They have a real impact on us and they change us.

When I read today’s scripture passage about the women at the tomb, I am strangely reminded of my friend’s reaction to *Mission Impossible*. Mary, Joanna, another Mary, and a few of their women friends are now done waiting. The Sabbath is over, so they stop stopping and go to Jesus’ tomb with their prepared spices and

ointments. Instead of finding Jesus' lifeless body, they find *no* body and have a dramatic conversation with two glowing beings about Jesus' resurrection. Talk about a situation requiring poetic faith! They run to tell the disciples the miraculous news. Our Lord is not dead! The disciples scoff and say that the women's words are "nonsense." In the version Lucas read, it says that the disciples accuse the women of telling "idle tales." The men don't believe the women. They don't think that what they say could possibly be true. It simply goes against common sense!

To be fair, when the women first see the empty tomb and angelic beings, they are also struck with disbelief. But then these angels remind the women that Jesus had already told them that he would be condemned, crucified, and then resurrected after 3 days. What Jesus said in life is consistent with what is happening after his death. It is only when the women are reminded of Jesus' words, that they suspend their disbelief. Or maybe we could say that they don't suspend their disbelief, they activate their belief. The women don't know *how* Jesus rose from the dead, just that he somehow did. That's what they come to believe.

I think it's very dangerous to say, "I don't know how this works, therefore it isn't true." Deciding that something is false based on our lack of knowledge reflects an arrogant certainty that does not open itself to the endless possibilities of life and the fathomless mystery that surrounds us at all times. There is so much more to God's wonderful creation than we know. The resurrection is one of these profound mysteries of God's creation. Our minds cannot fully grasp its meaning, but we know its power to somehow continuously renew and redeem us.

In Act 1, scene 5 of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, Hamlet and his friend Horatio see the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father with their own eyes. Horatio is astounded at the impossibility of what he is witnessing and Hamlet famously says: "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Born in the same year as Shakespeare, in 1564, the Italian astronomer Galileo invented a new powerful telescope with which he discovered, among other things, Jupiter's four largest satellites and the hills and valleys on the Moon. But, most controversially, Galileo also discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around as was previously thought. This threw the church into an uproar – how could Galileo dare to say that the earth, God's most prized creation, *not* be the centre of the universe?? For this discovery, Galileo was disciplined by the church.

Unfortunately, the powers have condemned many for revealing truths that they don't yet understand. "I don't know how this works, therefore it must not be true."

We don't fully understand how exactly the resurrection works, but we believe that in Christ all things are possible. On the Sabbath Saturday between the crucifixion and the resurrection, we wrestle with the liminal things that confuse us and may leave us disoriented and disillusioned. And on Easter morning, we awaken to the mystery that the tomb is empty and our hope is renewed.

I will conclude with this poem entitled "Easter Week" by Charles Kingsley, 20<sup>th</sup> century English priest, social reformer and poet:

See the land, her Easter keeping,  
Rises as her Maker rose.  
Seeds, so long in darkness sleeping,  
Burst at last from winter snows.  
Earth with heaven above rejoices;  
Fields and gardens hail the spring;  
Shaughes and woodlands ring with voices,  
While the wild birds build and sing.

You, to whom your Maker granted  
Powers to those sweet birds unknown,  
Use the craft by God implanted;  
Use the reason not your own.  
Here, while heaven and earth rejoices,  
Each his Easter tribute bring -  
Work of fingers, chant of voices,  
Like the birds who build and sing.

Amen