

**ST. CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH**  
**COBLESKILL, NEW YORK**

April 4, 2010 – RESURRECTION SUNDAY / EASTER C

The Rev. Nina George Hacker

Sermon: “*Shock and Awe*”\*

Acts 10:34-43	(God raised Jesus on the third day)
Psalms 118:14-29	(A psalm of ascent, triumphal procession into the Temple)
Colossians 3:1-4	(Believers in Jesus have new life)
St. Luke 24:1-10	(The Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

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A man from Michigan took a vacation to Florida at the height of winter. When he arrived, he was so excited about the wonderful climate, he was in a hurry to email his wife, whom he was expecting would follow soon. However, in his haste, the tourist inadvertently typed one letter of his spouse's email address incorrectly. Soon after, back in Delaware, a recently widowed pastor's wife was found by her children to have fainted dead away in front of her computer. Looking around for the cause, they read the message that appeared on the screen: “Hi Honey. Arrived safely. Hot as blazes down here. Can't wait for you to join me. Your loving husband.”<sup>1</sup>

Cute story ... but the reality is, no one has ever been able to communicate to us about life beyond the grave — no one except God in human flesh, Jesus Christ.

Everyone had seen Him crucified. The disciples, His mother Mary, the Jews and the Romans who had accused, taunted, and tortured Jesus, the passers by, and the morbidly curious.

All of them knew Jesus had died on the cross three days earlier. Jesus' followers were struggling over how to come to terms with their Master's death; they were in mourning.

Today, some of you may also be grieving the loss of a loved-one, whether recent, or many years ago. You may occasionally go to the cemetery to clear away the dead flowers and put some fresh ones on the grave, or perhaps, simply stand by the headstone, remembering, and speaking a few words in prayer . . . But imagine, for a moment, that when you got there, you found the grave open and your loved-one gone! Talk about a bad shock . . . Your first reaction would like be: “Where is she?” or “Who's taken his body?” Next, you'd probably whip out your cell phone and call the Police.

Then imagine further, that as you stood there anguished and bewildered, your deceased husband or long-gone mother came walking along the grassy plots, *alive!* — and that he or she called you by name and began talking to you. Talk about *awesome*. It would be terrifying and wonderful all at once. And in picturing such a miracle, perhaps you can relate to what the women at Jesus' tomb experienced that first Easter morning. First, a terrible shock. And then a tremendous awe, when the One whom they loved appeared to them *alive!*

Unfortunately, we will not find our loved-ones risen and walking in the garden — at least, not yet. However, Saint Paul testifies in 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 20, 23 CEV) that “Christ has been raised to life! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life.” Further, Paul assures us, because “Christ was the first to be raised to life ... his people will be raised to life when he returns.”

*Praise God! Alleluia!* This news is our greatest hope, both in this life and in the life to come. Jesus risen from the tomb proclaims for all the world that death and the grave need not have the final say. “All will be made alive in Christ,” the Bible declares in 1 Corinthians (15:22b).

Dr. Paul Stuckey, a pastor in Dayton, Ohio, recounts a story about an eye-catching ad in a Milwaukee, Wisconsin newspaper's classified section. Big bold letters advertised: "Used Tombstone for Sale." The text of the ad continued: "Real bargain for someone named 'Dingo'. For more information call . . ." The image of a used tombstone may, at first, seem to us morbid and creepy. But think again. A "used" tombstone means that its previous owner no longer has any need for it. It's a castoff, an unnecessary item. Christ's resurrection conveys the same message: *the tomb is empty!* The stone that closed the grave is no longer needed! Jesus Christ is risen!<sup>2</sup>

Now some would dispute whether Christ rose bodily. But be assured, He was not a ghost. Our risen Lord walked, talked, and ate with His disciples. St. Paul records that apart from revealing Himself to Mary Magdalene and the women, Jesus also appeared to John and Peter, "then to the twelve [and] to more than five hundred brothers and sisters . . . [to] James, then to all the apostles" [1 Cor. 15:5-7].

St. Luke agrees in Acts 1:3, where he writes that "after his suffering he presented himself alive to [the apostles] by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." That many witnesses could not have been hallucinating.

But why, on that first Easter morning, didn't Jesus' disciples believe the women who came racing from the garden tomb proclaiming they had seen the risen Lord? Later that same day, two of His disciples walking on the road to Emmaus also failed to recognize Jesus when He came alongside them. Was it because the Lord appeared in His resurrection body? St. Paul indicates that our spiritual bodies will differ in their properties from our earthly bodies, and Mark 16:12 notes that Jesus "appeared to them in another form." Or, were these disciples unable to recognize Christ because they were looking for a dead Jesus?

To this day, many still make that same mistake. For them, Jesus is merely a figure who lived in Palestine two thousand years ago and may have done some impressive things. But just as the popular Broadway musical "Godspell" ends with the crucifixion—leaving out the best, most meaningful, part of the story—poet Annie Johnson Flint has written:

Some of us stay at the cross, some of us wait at the tomb,  
quicken and raised with Christ yet lingering still in the gloom.  
Some of us 'bide at the Passover feast with Pentecost all unknown,  
the triumphs of grace in the heavenly place that our Lord has made His own.  
If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross, His work had been incomplete.  
If the Christ who was buried had stayed in the tomb, He had only known defeat,  
but the way of the cross never stops at the cross and the way of the tomb leads on  
to victorious grace in the heavenly place where the risen Lord has gone.<sup>3</sup>

The way of the cross doesn't stop on Calvary's hill. The way of the tomb leads onward and upward. The same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will not only raise us and our loved-ones on the Last Day, but can *raise up* whatever is dead in *your life*. The same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead can *breathe new life* into what is dead in your spirit, your mind and body, your home, your marriage, your kids, your work situation, your finances, and your relationships with others.

Have you been feeling estranged from God? Has your spiritual life dimmed a bit? Is some aspect of your existence or some part of your heart still stuck at the cross, or gridlocked at the tomb? Just as the risen Christ sought out Mary Magdalene in the garden, in order to comfort her weeping and soothe her sorrow, so that same Jesus longs to come to you this day and do the same for you.

Jesus' disciples thought they had lost Him. If you feel you have lost Christ, you can be sure that He is searching for you. And Scripture (Luke 15:4 & 8) assures us, that like the good Shepherd diligently going after a lost sheep, Jesus will seek you until He finds you. And once He catches you, He will not lightly let you go. If you have wandered away, Christ has missed you. He wants you back with Him again. Perhaps you are not the one who feels lost, but you know or love someone who is. Jesus is going after them, too. Keep on praying that He and they will have a life-transforming encounter.

Once we have such an encounter with the risen Lord, what is it that He wants for us? In St. John's account of that first Easter evening, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, He said to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." So:

First: **Peace**. The comforting, guiding, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Second: **Forgiveness**—for ourselves, and toward others.

Third: **Being sent forth** in Jesus' name. We are to spread the good news of His love and salvation, in every way we possibly can. These are what the Risen Lord wants for us. These are the great gifts of Easter to Christ's Church—to the people of St. Christopher's parish.

A few years ago, a letter appeared in the national news that was sent to a deceased person by the Indiana Department of Social Services. It read: "Please be advised that your food stamps will stop on March first, because we received notice that you passed away. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."<sup>4</sup>

Well, unless you happen to be Jesus Christ, it's highly unlikely there would be a change in your 'circumstances.' At least, not immediately. However, Christ's resurrection from the dead — something so shocking, so awesome that I couldn't resist titling this sermon "shock and awe," a phrase coined a few years ago in connection with U.S. military policy — Christ's resurrection from the dead is our *guarantee* that when He returns in glory to claim His kingdom on earth, we will live forever with the Lord.

Christ rose from that grave for YOU. And He ever lives to love, save, help, and pray for you. Like those first disciples to whom the risen Jesus appeared, you are not alone or bereft of His presence. And, as the angel promised the disciples in St. Matthew's account of the Resurrection, "he is going ahead of you . . . there you will see Him."

On this blessed and holy Easter day, I pray that God will open the eyes of our hearts, so that like Mary Magdalene, we will be able to say with confidence, "I have seen the Lord."

*Alleluia! and Amen.*

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>\*</sup> Adapted from a sermon by Nina George Hacker, 20 April 2003.

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous source / traditional humor remembered.

<sup>2</sup> Adapt. Brett Blair, "Used Tombstone . . . Real Bargain," [eSermons.com](http://eSermons.com) 24 March 2002 via <[illustrations@CLERGY.NET](mailto:illustrations@CLERGY.NET)> March 26, 2002. Used with permission.

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. Brett Blair, [eSermons.com](http://eSermons.com) via <[illustrations@CLERGY.NET](mailto:illustrations@CLERGY.NET)> March 12, 2002. Used with permission.

<sup>4</sup> Adapt. Brett Blair, "Noticed That You Passed Away," and "The Raising of Lazarus," [eSermons.com](http://eSermons.com) via <[illustrations@CLERGY.NET](mailto:illustrations@CLERGY.NET)> March 12, 2002. Used with permission.