

**“Giving Up Death” - John 20:1-18 – Rev. Jeff Childs**

This year we have talked about giving up things for Lent. But we put a new spin on it as we have talked about giving up things like Control, Enemies, Superiority, Expectations, Life and Popularity. With Easter we culminate the series with Giving Up Death. Let me begin by noting the flowers. These spring flowers mean that the dead of winter is not the end. Somewhere back in February you maybe thought that winter was never going to end. But Spring cannot be bound. Spring abounds! Look around this morning at the beautiful flowers. Thank you to all who shared them with us this morning!

From this old familiar Easter story what can we say about Giving Up Death? It seems in our culture we don't like to talk about Death (some don't even want to think about it.) In a sense maybe that is a way we can think we are giving up death by not using the word. Think about yourself. Now realize some who are actively grieving are thinking about it a lot and often talking about it in just about every conversation. That is where I see Mary Magdalene in this story. Here her grief is compounded because not only was Jesus dead and buried but now his body is missing. It reminds me of one of the euphemisms some people might use to not have to talk about Death. What do we say when we do not want to talk about death? In my mind I hear it in hospital scenes on TV or in the movies when the surgeon comes to the family and says, “I'm sorry, but we lost him.” I don't use that one but often say or “passed away” or “passed on”. In western movie lingo we might hear of one “heading for the last round up” or maybe that someone “kicked the bucket,” or “bit the dust.” If you watch gangster movies you might hear that someone with cement galoshes “sleeps with the fishes.” We can be colorful when we give up the word “death.” Death sounds so final, but I want to give up that concept because of the Easter resurrection we believe in eternal life beyond this life. Death is but the doorway or passageway. Perhaps I will start using the technological term “Upgraded.” (Unless you think they went to that other place and then maybe the term is “Downgraded!”)

Because of the resurrection, and our belief in the resurrection, we can give up the Fear of Death. It is not the end as I said a couple weeks ago when we talked about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. No, life is everlasting. And for Christians, it is not just that it lasts forever, but the starting point has moved forward. It does not begin after you wake up from “the Big Sleep” (another good euphemism!) No! For Christians eternal life begins when we begin to believe and live like believers. It begins today. We can start living the eternal life and begin to fulfil what we pray in the Lord's Prayer – “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We can live into God's Kingdom into eternal life today. Not fearing death and the end but fully living for God's sake. You can be upgraded to living fully.

The tomb is empty. Christ is risen! Death is not the final end, death does not win. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”* . . . *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57) Death does not have the last word. God has the last word, and that word is not Death but Life - Life Eternal. Suffering and Death end but God's Kingdom, and our life within it, lasts forever.

I see this in the transformation of Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning from Grief to Belief. And that will spread as she shares it with the disciples, and they in turn share it with others and the Good News spreads. They share their lives and their stories with others. One by one upgrading to being born anew or born again into a new life a new way of life. One not based on fear but faith, not on the finite but the infinite, not fixated on death but focused on Jesus. Are you ready for such a life, are you ready to renew your commitment to that life? Then I want you to give up Death and begin to live it.

Today I invite you to give up Death and the fear of it. Unless the rapture comes and we are all taken up to heaven, death is inevitable. So, I want you to plan for it and talk with your loved ones about it. There are a few exceptions but most times when I sit down with grieving family members to talk about a funeral service people are clueless about any favored hymns or scripture passages of their loved one. They will often say, “we never talked about it.” Do your family a favor, talk about it. At the end of the service, I will hand out a worksheet that I developed a few years ago to help people plan for the end of this earthly life to help their family know their wishes and to take care of a few important details. Get your affairs in order. Think about being an organ donor. It can comfort loved ones to know that we are able to help others prolong their life in a significant way. Make a list of all of your prized possessions and to whom you would like to have them – so they don’t fight over them! And I would like you to start to write your own obituary. How would you like to summarize your life. And if there are things you would like to change or add to it, before you kick the bucket start a bucket list and talk with your family about doing those items you have always wanted to do while you can still do them. Claim the resurrection in your own life and go out and live it. Alleluia and Amen.

### **The Tomb Is Empty for Christ Is Alive**

Jeffrey B. Childs 4/13/25

The tomb is empty for Christ is alive!  
It’s impossible, yet God is able!  
Even the frailest faith God can revive,  
As we believe the unbelievable.

Christ died on the cross with thorns for a crown,  
His body and blood were given for us,  
Christ turned the whole world upside down,  
Today we rejoice and join heaven's chorus.

Christ was, and is, and ever shall be,  
Rejoice for there's Good News to share  
Though dead, our lives are now set free,  
Christ is alive! Spread the news everywhere.