

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: April 16, 2017  
Sermon Title: Easter Sunday: What If It's True?  
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## **What IF? *An Easter Litany***

David: What if it all happened?

**People: What if  
early on Sunday  
the women came to the tomb  
not believing  
and the men slept late  
probably depressed  
and everything seemed sad, until . . .**

Alida: What if  
the too, too heavy stone  
with the Roman seal on it  
and soldiers guarding it  
so nobody could tamper with it  
was mysteriously rolled away  
and the tomb was wide open?

David: What if  
nobody was in the tomb  
nobody and no body  
except an angel  
who said things that couldn't possibly be true?

**People: What if  
it was all true  
that angels are real  
and angels are sent from God at just the right time  
and angels speak to us with just the right words?**

Alida:           What if the right words are  
*don't be afraid*  
*He is risen*  
*She is risen*  
*Your loved ones are risen*  
*You will be risen*  
*Life wins*  
*Love wins*  
*Death is defeated?*

David:           What if the women  
scared, perplexed, overjoyed  
all at once  
told the men, who were  
scared, perplexed, and not yet overjoyed . . .

Alida:           Until  
one by one  
they see an empty tomb  
with NO body  
until Somebody shows up  
and they see wounds without sorrow  
they see faith beyond doubt  
they see a story that needs telling  
They see God at work!

**ALL:            What if  
we lived the rest of our lives  
with love stronger than sorrow  
love stronger than doubt  
love stronger than hate  
with love that so loved the world  
that the world was given  
the greatest Love of all?  
And we believed it?  
All of it.**

I had a funeral here last year, right here in the sanctuary, and, as so often happens, the family gathered from all over the country to honor their loved one. As I waited for the service to begin, I stood on the lawn in front of the Church, welcoming people. Looking across the lawn, I saw a handsome young man, wearing a long flowing saffron robe and sandals, walking toward me. Out on the lawn he shook my hand, and we walked into the Church together.

As soon as he got started up the aisle, he saw the cross, and immediately dropped down on the carpet, laid himself flat out on the rug, prostrating himself before the cross. He was the grandson of the deceased, and he was a Buddhist showing his respect. He didn't have to do that. We don't make you fall down or kneel before the cross! But here comes this guy from another religion, another mindset, another worldview, and when he sees that cross, he falls down to worship.

For him, seeing that cross, he realized there was something special, something important, something real about our Christian story. This story of Crucifixion and Resurrection, this story of death and life, this story of Good Friday and Easter touched him so deeply that he offered the greatest sign of respect he knew from his own tradition: he humbled himself, he bowed down, he worshiped.

For a year, Alida and I have had this thought: how would all of us, you and me, live our lives differently, if . . . *if* we really, truly, 100 percent, honest-to-goodness believed our Christian story? Not just *wished* it to be true, or *hoped* it's true. Most people would love it to be true! What if we believed it?

We started with Christmas. On Christmas Eve, Alida and I preached a two-part sermon asking you how your life would be different in 2017 if we really believed all that Christmas stuff. We actually had everyone say it out loud in a unison reading just like the "What If" litany we all we just read; well, we did one for Christmas too. This is what you said Christmas Eve:

### **"What IF?"- A Christmas Eve Litany**

David:           What if it all happened?

**People:           What if God came down  
in a little baby  
in a tiny village  
in a humble stable  
in a poor family  
long, long ago  
far, far away?**

David:           What if  
shepherds really were watching their flocks by night  
and angels really did sing  
                    of good news  
                    of great joy

for all people  
loud and clear?

**People:**      **What if  
a star did wander the skies  
and caught the wise men's eyes  
who followed the star  
and found the baby  
and gave their gifts?**

David:            What if it all happened  
really, really happened  
and we believed  
really, really believed  
the prophecy,  
the miracle,  
the purpose,  
the person?

**Together:**    **What if  
we spent a full year  
— all of 2017 —  
living each moment  
as if  
we believed tonight?**

Today we are asking you the same question about Easter. What *if* the Easter story is true? Not just the springtime analogy, we get that. We love that. Easter is a symbol of spring. Spring is a symbol of Easter, rebirth, renewal. Trees budding, flowers blooming, the earth comes to life again, the Dogwoods are getting ready to blossom soon, and you're all going to help make the Dogwood Festival a huge success again, right? The 82nd annual resurrection of the Dogwood Festival! What seems dead springs back to life!

How is that for a seamless plug for you to help at this year's Dogwood Festival? But, why not? It's a good plug for the Dogwood Festival and a good analogy for Easter. Up on this hill, after six months of bleak, dark, gray days; snow, slush, ice, mud; all life stripped away from trees and yards and flowerbeds, everything seemingly dead . . . And it all springs back to life! What a great analogy!

So yes: Spring/Easter/new life. Got it. Crocuses poking through the frozen tundra in late March are always a welcome sight. But that's not why we're here on Easter. I was here in late March when the crocuses started poking through,

but this Church wasn't packed then! The Easter story is not about spring, it's not just about crocuses, lilies, or tulips.

I'm going to end my little mini-message the same way I ended my sermon two weeks ago. "Easter," I said, "Everybody comes to Church on Easter for a very simple reason. May I be blunt? Everybody comes because everybody dies. Everybody misses somebody. Everybody wants to believe that after death there is more . . . more love, more time, more life. Somehow.

"Sure, I know that here this morning we are all over the place when it comes to our faith—doubts, unbelief, the full spectrum. I know all about atheists on the increase, people fed up with organized religion. I get all that. Life ends. We're in the ground. I get all that. But here's a *fact*, not a *fancy*. I mean a *real fact*. Once a year, and several very, very, very special times in our lifetime, we want faith. We really, really, really want faith. We want to believe that there is a God who can take the worst moment of our life, *the worst*, and transform it into a miracle.

"And so, in this little Church, this old rickety Church, we do what we've been doing up on this hill for 300 years: we grab hold of faith and let it take us for a ride.

"That's why we're here. So, how would we live our days differently if we really, truly, 100 percent, honest-to-goodness believed it?"

Let us conclude with this beautiful old Easter hymn, "Crown Him With Many Crowns," No. 234:

*Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless king  
through all eternity.*

*Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save;  
his glories now we sing  
who died and rose on high,*

*who died eternal life to bring,  
and lives that death may die.*

*Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified;  
no angels in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends their burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.*

*Crown him the Lord of years,  
the potentate of time,  
creator of the rolling spheres,  
ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.*