

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022  
Sermon: Easter Message I: "Wonder (and enthusiasm!)"  
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

## Call to Worship: *Remembering the Story Together*

(Luke 24)

Leader: Alleluia, Christ is risen!

**People: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Leader: On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

**People: They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.**

Leader: When they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

**People: While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.**

Leader: In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them,

**People: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"**

Leader: Alleluia, Christ is risen!

**People: He is risen indeed**

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## Easter Message

David Johnson Rowe

From time to time, Alida will say to me, "There's this story I used in a sermon 10 years ago; it's really good. Do you think I can use it again this Sunday?" And I'll say, "Whenever I preach, no one remembers what I said a week later. Don't worry about it."

But there may be a few steel-trap minds in our Church who will remember that today's sermon title, "Wonder and Enthusiasm," are the same titles we used for our Christmas Eve service less than four months ago! Different sermons, but same titles: "Wonder and Enthusiasm."

The Easter story, like the Christmas story, is filled with both. Lots of wonder. Lots of enthusiasm. And, remember, we use "wonder" in two ways. Something happens, and we might say, "Wait a minute! What just happened there?" (Emphasis on the question mark) or, we might say, "Holy cow! Look at what just happened there!" (Emphasis on the exclamation point).

To wonder can mean to question, to doubt, to not be sure. But to be filled with wonder means we are amazed, surprised, awed. And sometimes they blend together.

There are things I don't understand, that I have real questions about. But they still amaze me. Flying, for example. Skyscrapers. Things in nature like the Northern Lights. Things in sports. There are things that today's athletes do that I know can't be done, yet they do them, so I wonder how they do them . . . yet I'm filled with wonder that they're doing them.

Easter is full of both kinds of wonder. Let me quickly summarize the familiar territory of the Easter story: Jesus is killed on Good Friday afternoon, buried later that day. On Sunday, early in the morning, some women followers of Jesus go to the tomb with perfume and spices for a last cleansing of the body. A tradition, a kindness, a sign of respect. Not hope. No one had any hope. No one had any expectations.

Nobody was wondering anything. Their questions were dead-ended. Their hopes were dead-ended. And yet, in short order, the women find the tomb empty, the body of Jesus, gone, an angel standing there. Then Jesus appears and shows he's O.K. They run back to the male disciples. The men make fun of the women for believing; a couple of the guys run to the tomb. They find nothing.

Meanwhile, Jesus visits two other men, tries to explain it all until they finally get it and believe; so they run back to tell the disciples that Jesus is O.K., better than O.K.

Jesus shows up to all the disciples except Thomas, who is absent, so he doesn't believe any of it until Jesus shows up when Thomas is there . . . and now he's convinced!

In other words, within just a few days, all those would-be Christians, those first believers in Jesus being something more than just a good guy, those folks were

filled with wonder. Both kinds: wonder as in lots of questions, wonder as in awe, amazement.

On Easter morning, the Bible tells us, the women wondered who would roll the stone away from in front of the tomb. They wondered who had stolen Jesus's body, they wondered what manner of being or ghost or apparition was speaking to them when Jesus showed up. The men wondered if they should check it out themselves after the women told them about Jesus. And all of the men, including the extra followers on the road to Emmaus, they wondered what it all meant. But the wonder of questions soon turned to the wonder of amazement.

Let me use a simple analogy: life with cancer. Which, like Holy Week, is full of challenges. Here in Fairfield we've been involved in two cancer-centered projects: Jeff Keith's Connecticut Challenge and the Relay for Life.

Alida and I have done a lot of the Relay for Life events—you'll remember them down at the Ludlowe High football field. Kids and families would raise funds and earn their funds by walking laps around the track for 12 hours or more.

They usually began at 4 PM and would go on till 6 AM. I'd give a speech to survivors in the early evening. Alida would give the closing prayer to everyone who made it through the night. Middle-school and high-school kids used to set up tents, stay up all night doing laps, dancing, napping, eating, doing more laps.

The highlight for me was the official start to the walk, the first laps always done by people with cancer—in treatment, determined, focused. One year it was one of our own great ladies, one of our choir members. Her cancer surgery had been just a few weeks before; her treatments were in full force. But she was going to make that one lap with her head erect, a smile on that face, straight ahead toward the goal. The next year she was back and stayed the whole night.

The Connecticut Challenge began 11 years ago, right outside this Church. I said a prayer for the riders, and we rang the Church bell to kick it off.

Every year begins with a cancer survivor, someone who has faced the hard questions, who has wondered and wondered and wondered some more. And they stand up there as symbols of life; they've turned the wonder of questions and doubt into the wonder of joy and amazement.

Truth is, we are all in the same boat. It may be to varying degrees, varying levels of urgency, different kinds of crises, different challenges and obstacles.

But we all know what it's like to sit at the kitchen table, maybe alone, considering choices, weighing options, figuring the odds; plenty to wonder about, lots of question marks.

That's when faith is put to the test. I'll go farther: that's when faith cries out to be put to the test. In anything in life, we can view it through the eyes of despair and doubt or through the eyes of wonder.

The women at the tomb turned from wondering to wonder-ful; the men from Emmaus turned from wondering to wonder-ful; the disciples minus Thomas turned from wondering to wonder-ful; Thomas turned from wondering to wonder-ful.

Day by day, one person at a time, people turned their question marks into exclamation points. Just as Good Friday became Easter.

At our Church, we love questions. We are not afraid of doubts; wonder all you want . . . then, let all that wondering lead us to faith that is wonder-ful.

Amen.

## **Benediction Litany**

**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.**

Let's stand and sing our final hymn today, "Crown Him with Many Crowns!"  
No. 234 in your Hymnal.

*1 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.*

*2 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.*

*3 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.*

*4 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.*