



Easter's Lost and Found



A Sermon By

The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

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The Sunday of the Resurrection

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found at on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-03-27-AWW.mp3>.*

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Luke 24:1-12

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*A But Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves...*
(Luke 24:12)

It was very early in the morning, and the disciples were just beginning their day, when Mary Magdalene, Joanna and some of the other women came bursting in. They had this crazy story about being to the tomb, Jesus' body missing and two men in dazzling clothes. The disciples did not believe them. They thought it was an idle tale, and I suppose, we cannot blame them. If we had been there with the disciples, we probably would have reacted the same way.

But then, there was Peter.

When Peter heard the women's story, he got up from where he was and ran out to the tomb. We can never know what was going through Peter's mind or why he did what he did. We would like to think Peter believed the women's story and wanted to see the empty tomb for himself. But, I am not so sure. I think Peter ran out because, deep down, he was looking for something else...

We have to remember that Peter loved Jesus more than anything. Peter was the first disciple whom Jesus called, and he took that role very seriously, always trying to be the best disciple he could be. Wherever Jesus went, Peter was right there with him, listening and asking questions. Peter knew Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would save the people of Israel, and Peter would have done anything for Jesus. "I am ready to go with you to prison or death," Peter declared.

But then came that night, the night Jesus was arrested. Peter had the opportunity to stand behind his words and stand beside Jesus, but he could not find the courage. Instead, Peter denied knowing Jesus. He denied Jesus three times, and to make things even worse, Jesus knew it. When Peter denied Jesus that third time, Jesus turned and looked Peter right in the eye, right into his soul, and in that moment, Peter felt the guilt and shame wash over him like a giant wave.

I think we can all sympathize with Peter. We all know what it is like to carry around a little guilt. We all feel guilty about things we have done or things we have not done. We beat ourselves up over eating dessert, saying "no" to a friend, not checking email, or spending the day binging on Netflix. We feel badly about not exercising enough or not going to church enough (I hear that one a lot). And, family relationships are fraught with guilt. It tears us up inside to think we are not spending enough time with our kids, or not making our partner happy, or somehow, letting our parents down, especially as they get older.

It does not help that we live in a modern-day shame culture. Everywhere we turn society tells us we are not smart enough, or pretty enough, or good enough, or just don't measure up. We start to experience shame in middle school and high school; and after that, it never, ever lets up; and, the internet and social media only make it worse. As the best-selling author Brene Brown writes, "Shame is something we all experience. And while it feels as if shame hides in our darkest corners, it actually tends to lurk in all of the familiar places, including appearance and body image, family, parenting, money and work... aging and religion. To feel shame is to be human."¹

Peter was feeling very human that first Easter morning. He was keenly aware of his shortcomings and mistakes, and the guilt and shame of it all were overwhelming. Peter had turned his back on Jesus, and he could not live with that. His betrayal was eating him alive, and he did not know how to go on, how to live his life. Peter was carrying around all of this emotional baggage, and so when he ran out to the tomb, I think he was looking for hope and forgiveness. He was searching for a second chance, a shot at redemption, an opportunity to reclaim his true self. After all that had happened over the last few days, Peter felt empty and lost, and he needed to find himself again.

Peter's story always reminds me of another story, one involving our middle son, James.

When James was born, his grandmother gave him a white baby blanket, and like all baby blankets, it was incredibly soft and cuddly. James loved his blanket, and even as he got older, that love never wavered. Other toys would come and go – his Davy Crockett hat, his Star Wars characters, even his Gameboy – but James' love for "blankie" endured. The two of them were inseparable. They went everywhere together, and so when James went off to school, blankie went with him to live underneath James' pillow.

Over the years, blankie had a habit of wandering off, and whenever that happened James was beside himself. He would scream and cry and throw a temper tantrum, until everybody in the family stopped what they were doing to help look for blankie and, of course, blankie would always turn up, between the car seat and the door, or underneath the bed, or hidden in the couch. Occasionally, we found blankie in the clothes dryer smelling much better than before. And one time, we actually found blankie in the garbage. To this day, James is convinced his mother threw blankie out on purpose, but just to be clear, there is no evidence to support that allegation.

Whenever blankie wandered off, it would always come back a little bit worse for wear. There would be a little rip here, or little tear there, maybe even a small piece missing, but that never bothered James. James was always so happy to see blankie. He would just hug it as tightly as he could and wouldn't let go. James is a young adult now, living in Atlanta, but he still loves blankie today just as much as he did the first day he got blankie, even though now, blankie looks like this...

All of us are a little like blankie. Over the years, we have a tendency to wander off and get lost from God. We do things that separate us from God: we use mean words in talking about people; we harass and hold down those who are different; we take our friends, our co-workers, or even our family members for granted. We don't treat each other the way we want to be treated, respecting

¹ Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*

the dignity of every human being and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In other words, we sin. We turn our backs on God, lose our way, and get a little ragged around the edges.

But, on Easter, we learn that no matter what we do, no matter how far we wander, no matter how lost we might get, we are never out of God's reach. God is always out there looking for us, searching for us, wanting nothing more than to find us, hug us and hold us tight. Nothing will ever separate us from the love God. No matter what we do, no matter what we say, God is always willing to forgive us. That's how much God loves us. We are God's prized possessions. We are God's blankie. And, God loves us just as much today as God did on the day God created us.

When Peter arrived at the tomb that first Easter morning, stooping and looking in, he saw the linen clothes by themselves. He did not find the body of Jesus, but Jesus found him. And, Peter experienced hope, and forgiveness, and the love of God that surpasses human understanding, and it changed his life forever.

Today, let Jesus find you. Let his love wash over you like a giant wave, and it will change your life, as well and forever.

Happy Easter!