

## **Sermon: He is not here, for He is risen!**

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, April 5, 2026, Easter)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Rarely are cemeteries as peaceful as they seem. The first house Daisy and I bought in North York, a suburb north of Toronto, was nearby a public cemetery. The house, actually a modest bungalow, was one of the few we visited that we could afford. We did not relish living so close to a cemetery. In fact, I think my mother had poop-poop the idea at first, which might've actually propelled me to go ahead—given my rebellious nature and all.

We were not superstitious, not prone to be frightened of ghosts or ghouls, yet, if I must be honest, which is dictated by the virtue of my profession, and on the account that God is watching, taking notes of what I say from the pulpit, I admit that living so close to the land of the dead did give me the creep.

We lived in that bungalow for close to ten years, and noting ever came of that cemetery, except for a few times Daisy and I had ventured to stroll through the cemetery, counted a few head stones, and read a few last words. Public cemeteries in Canada, by and large, are mostly well kept, mostly peaceful and maybe a bit dull.

I suspect that was not the case in the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem's ancient cemetery, a place for both the dead and the living, on the account of Passover pilgrims spending nights there. Imagine the conversations taking place there in the first century AD, the festal atmosphere intermixed with political tension simmering just beneath the surface.

In fact, didn't Zechariah prophesied the site to be the opening scene of the great 'Day of the Lord', where God would split the the Mount of Olives into two by an earthquake, divide it by a wide valley where inhabitants of the city could flee, where the dead would be raised, where God and all the holy ones of the Lord shall come. (Zechariah 14:1-5)

Until then, until that awesome day, unfinished business lingers in the Mont of Olives, in every graveyard really—of broken promises, dash hopes, unfulfilled loves, and untold secrets left to perish with the departed. Only

silence remain, that unbearable silence standing guard in the land of the dead, where the stone will never be rolled away.

Then came the two Marys—Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary”, who is widely understood to be the mother of James and Joses, as per Matthew 27. They had previously witnessed the horror of Golgotha, a sorrowful sight that no one should ever want to revisit. Yet, they came again, to see the tomb where Jesus was buried.

The verb used here ‘to see’ in Greek is *theóreo*. It can also be translated as ‘to behold’, ‘to perceive’, ‘to consider’, or ‘to observe’. It is not merely looking; it suggests studying and discerning, which begs the question: What were the two Marys looking to find?

Their inquisitiveness was blocked by soldiers guarding the tomb—dispatched by frightened officials. What were they afraid of? Were they concerned of people going in, or coming out, of a particular individual?

Certainly dead don’t rise. Death closes the chapter on a person. Whatever hopes and dreams a person might have—might’ve envisioned, shared, preached, and proclaimed—they die with death. Death turns the page, closes the case, nails the coffin. Finito, or does it?

The good news of Easter Sunday bears this utmost message: It doesn’t. The Triune God is aggrieved by the death of the Son, and heavens would not rest. On the third day, the angel of the Lord came like lightening, and kicked the stone away. Ok, maybe not kicked but gentled rolled it aside and sat on it.

Those standing guard of the dead shook and became like dead, paralyzed by fear of this angel of the Lord. Yet the angel assured the women, “*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised.*” (Matthew 28:5-6)

He is not here; He has been raised, and the heavens and earth broke out in songs and dance. Dance, dance, wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the Dance, said he. I’ll lead you all, wherever you may be, and I’ll lead you all in the dance, said he.

Where in the Bible does it say that Jesus danced? It doesn’t, it’s a poetic licence employed by the song writer, Sydney Carter, I think. Jesus might’ve danced during the wedding banquet in Cana, as per John 2. But the Bible never explicitly recorded Jesus as having danced.

David did, he danced before the Lord while welcoming the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, wearing only a linen ephod, as per 2 Samuel 6. His public and ecstatic display of unadulterated worship was meant to

celebrate God's goodness and faithfulness, which earned him a private rebuke from his wife Michal, who felt David acted foolishly, undignified. But what is one to do but dance, when one is besieged by an overwhelming sense of joy, emanating from somewhere deep within?

I suspect that is what was happening with the two Marys, when told of the risen Jesus. They danced, not literally but figuratively, as the fear of the unknown subsides, as the good news of such great joy resides, they waltz, they salsa, and took a two-step.

Then they were sent out, by the angels of the Lord: "Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Jesus has gone on ahead, he is on the move, he is Lord of the dance. He is leading the dance, leading the way, he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

As the two Mary's went, leaving their fear and doubt behind, they were surprisingly met on the way by the risen Jesus. "Χαίρετε", says the Lord, with a greeting that is truly multipurpose. It could simply be a 'hello', or it could be a 'good-bye', much like 'salute' in French, or 'shalom' in Hebrew. At the root of Χαίρετε is an undeniable imperative: Rejoice! Rejoice and be glad! For I am the Christ, I have risen. I am alive! So the two women took holds of his feet and worshipped.

They then went on to tell others of this great news: Christ is risen, He is alive! Why don't we practice doing the same? I like to invite all of you to turn to someone sitting close by, and say to them: Christ is risen, He is alive!

Sisters and brothers in Christ, on this joyful and glorious Easter Sunday, where we gather and worship the risen Christ, let us leave our doubts, our fear behind. Let us strike out joyfully for the shore of Galilee. For Jesus is beckoning us to follow in this great dance of life, in the banquet of God, accompanied by the most sublime quartet where we get to mingle with angels, heavenly hosts, and the cloud of witnesses of resurrected saints, where the hors-d'œuvre is succulent, the finest wine flows uninterrupted, and the music never stop.

Glory be to the Triune God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**