

Easter Sermon 2026 11:00 AM

Easter Sermon 2026.04.05  
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## **Keep Easter Weird**

*(Easter: Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24; John 20:1–18)*

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...this is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

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“Weird?” “Weird?” Honestly, Gene, “weird?”

Because I can read your minds, especially on Easter, I can hear some of you saying to yourselves of the title of this morning’s sermon, “Really, Gene? Of all the words you could have chosen to describe Easter you picked ‘weird’?”

Why not joyful? “This joyful Eastertide, away with sin and sorrow. . . .”

Or why not happy? “We wish you a happy Easter, we wish you a happy Easter. . . .”

Or why not triumphant? “Up from the grave he arose!”

Theologians, poets, hymn writers, and preachers have all ransacked the church’s vocabulary to find words to describe the central fact and central mystery of the Christian faith, and as far as I know, I’m the first to choose weird.

And the reason I chose it is not because I’ve ever been to the city of Austin, Texas, where the phrase “Keep Austin Weird” launched

a thousand imitators, including me, but rather because I am hoping, since most of you recognize the cultural referent that's already in your head, that you'll remember what Easter is all about, and what the resurrection is all about, and what your life can be all about if you will allow Easter, the resurrection, and the risen Jesus Christ make you the you that God created you to be.

And that you, if it's the new you, the you of the new and eternal life that Jesus promised, the reborn you that Jesus spoke of with Nicodemus – that you will have to be a little weird. Because there's nothing normal about resurrection, and the people who are living resurrection life are going to appear to the rest of the world a little weird.

“See how these Christians love one another!” ancient people said of the first Christians, according to the early Christian writer Tertullian. The first Christians were a mixed bunch from all walks of life, all social strata, and all sorts of cultures and ethnicities, and in the ancient world, that kind of jumble looked completely weird because people tended to take care of their own. There was safety in numbers, especially if that number was small, looked like you, and talked like you. I see it still today in fellowship time; people tend to sit with their friends. I see it when I look out into the pews. We tend toward sameness. Like attracts like. That's the natural order.

And Christians are meant to be – and apparently once upon a time were – completely unnatural in their care not only of each other but of outsiders, as well. Tribalism, in the worst sense of that word, was one of the first and most aggressively attacked targets of the ministry of reconciliation of the first Christians, and,

sadly, we're seeing a deep, depressing, and destructive resurgence of tribalism right now.

I was over at the gym the other night, mixing it up with the spandex vibe, and I was listening to Krista Tippett interview Rabbi Shai Held, whose latest book is entitled *Judaism Is About Love*, a title that comes as a surprise to many of us, which is why Professor Held felt the need to write his book. Many of us, especially us Christians, have grown up with the stereotype of Judaism as the religion of laws and rules and Christianity as the religion of love.

But when you actually look at the foundational texts themselves, you discover that Rabbi Jesus' summary of the law – “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” – is taken from Deuteronomy and, of all places, Leviticus, the priests' handbook.

The so-called law, it turns out, is actually an instruction manual to help us love God above all else and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And in the world in which those precepts were developed, the idea of loving the neighbor as one loved oneself was completely weird. Nobody did that because nobody thought it was possible or even desirable. In the ancient world, it wasn't simply “family first”; as Prof. Held lamented in his interview, “family first” too often degenerates into “family only.”

But Jesus proved that it is possible and it is desirable to overcome that entirely natural and always destructive impulse, and to live in an entirely new way, recognizing as family those who live in the image and likeness of their Creator.

And God affirmed that possibility and desirability and Jesus' way of life on Easter morning, and that's what we're here to celebrate: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from old death to new life, and his promise to all of us that we can begin living that new and eternal life right now, right here, right as we are. The only thing keeping you from the new you is the old you, the you you brought through the door with you this morning, the you you continue to cling to so fiercely and desperately, the you that you cannot imagine living without.

And that's precisely what I want to urge upon you this morning—imagine it! Imagine that the story is, in fact, true. Not historically true, because history, as well all know, is a slender reed on which to balance matters of ultimate concern. We can't even agree on the results of a presidential election of six years ago – how reliable does that make history? History is not about telling the truth; history is about the winners telling their version of truth as if it were everybody's truth. Law enforcement officers know that eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable. We don't see things; we think we see things. Our brains process optical images and make sense of them not on the basis of what's "out there," but rather on what's "in here."

And that's what Easter is all about. We use the language of resurrection to make sense of what the God of love did "in here" to a handful of first-century Jews living on that contested piece of God's earth called Israel, convincing them that they had experienced the One chosen by God to free us from our own destructive selves: our passions, our prejudices, our illusions, our self-centeredness, our willingness to collude in abominations, and above all else, our fears. For fear is what holds most of us

captive, and fearing to appear weird is one of our most debilitating fears.

Most of us are not afraid of death; most of us ignore death most of the time, living with the tacit illusion that we'll live forever. It's not that big fear that holds most of us back, it's the little fears, the daily fears, the relentless fears. The fear that I won't be loved or that I won't be able to return someone else's love. The fear of being alone. The fear of being miserable with someone. The fear of running out of money or of not knowing what to do with the money I have. The fear of not fitting in. The fear of not being a good parent. The fear of making a mistake or the fear of being found out for the mistakes I've made.

And on and on the list of fears goes. We teach ourselves to be afraid. Remember "stranger danger," when we taught children to be afraid of people they don't know? That's most of the people in the world and that will be the case for all of us for all of our lives: most of the world's people will be strangers to us, and if we are taught as children to fear them we set our children on a fearful – literally full of fear – path in the world. There are other ways and better ways to keep our children safe.

"Perfect love casts out fear," the first epistle of John tells us, somewhat surprisingly, because most of us would think that verse should read "Perfect love casts out hate," but as Tippett said in the interview with Rabbi Held, love is the only force we've discovered as powerful as fear in a human body.

And most of us have a terribly hard time believing that truth. Our fears chain us to the lie that power is the antidote to fear, and that the more power we have the less we will have to be afraid of.

But history shows that thinking to be a powerful deception, one of the chief deceptions of the devil. Since we split the atom more than half a century ago, human beings have had more power to destroy than most of us can imagine, and yet what is the world's state of mind today? It is fear, the deathly fear that the power we unleashed will fall into the wrong hands – a rogue state, a failed state, a terrorist organization, or simply bog-standard criminals – and those people of our fearful imaginings will turn the destructive power that we unleashed against us. The world teaches us to be afraid, and we accept that teaching, we internalize it and then project it, and then we tell ourselves that that is the way the world is, that the narrative of hate and fear and violence is the true one and that other one, the one we heard read out earlier in this service, the resurrection narrative, is irresponsible illusion or wishful thinking or group hallucination.

But resurrection is none of those things. Resurrection is not Jesus coming “back” to life; that's resuscitation, and it happens all the time in ambulances and emergency rooms. Jesus isn't raised by God to this old life; Jesus is raised by God to new life for the sake of this old life, a new life that goes beyond our senses, beyond common sense, beyond normal reality, into the realm of transcendent reality, the reality of the world to come, the reality of God's realm that Jesus taught us to pray for every day: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Our citizenship, Paul said, is in heaven, Paul's language for the realm of resurrection, and that realm is weird: the first are last, the greatest are the least, and strangers aren't a danger, they are the guests we are to receive as our siblings in Christ.

That's not just weird; it's wildly, wonderfully, beautifully weird. It is that new heaven and new earth that Isaiah and all the prophets, including Jesus, envisioned in their most ecstatic moments. It's that new Jerusalem, gifted to us from heaven as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day that captured the heart and mind and soul of John on Patmos.

What the realm of resurrection is not is a triumphalist Christendom with the cross in one hand and the sword in the other or a godless secularity that cannot hope beyond the bounds of this world only. All of the empires across all of the cultures across all of the centuries of human history, including imperial Christianity, all thought that they were one that would last forever, and none of them did, none of them has, and none of them will, and that includes our own. Coercive power never lasts. But the love that raised Jesus Christ from old death to new life does. It did it then, it is doing it now, and it will do it forever. And the good news of the gospel is that it can do it for you.

Trusting in resurrection power must of necessity make one weird because no one except the Christian church embraces resurrection as a thing. A real thing. A powerful thing. A transforming thing. A world-changing thing. A thing you can give your life to.

So go ahead, friends, on this Easter morning: keep Easter weird. Keep it away from commercialization, keep it away from normalization, keep it away from domestication. Keep Easter out of step with the vicious reality we're being told to accept, the reality of imprisoning innocent children in detention centers and bombing a girls' school in Iran. Keep Easter away from the anti-

LGBTQIA bills that are being introduced in state after state, over and over again.

Keep Easter away from all of that and so much more that passes for normal in our majority-Christian nation where the majority of Christians have succumbed to the twin temptations of power and fear.

Keep Easter weird. Keep Easter distinctly and shockingly and counter-culturally Christ-following. Walk in step with Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ, and keep Easter out of step with a violent and broken world. Keep Easter the central proclamation of the church and the central proclamation of your life.

Keep Easter weird those ways and the many other ways the Spirit leads you. Keep Easter weird. And then let Easter keep you.