

**The Rev. Christine Mendoza**  
**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
**Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026**  
**Jeremiah 31:1-6 & Matthew 28:1-10**

Our first lesson this morning is from the prophet Jeremiah. More is known about him than most of the other prophets in our canon of scripture. Jeremiah lived during the most crucial period of Judah's existence as a kingdom. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple after he had relentlessly warned his people to mend their ways before it was too late. After this catastrophe, tradition holds that he wrote the Book of Lamentations in which he bitterly lamented Israel's terrible fate, and some scholars refer to him as "the weeping prophet".

Jeremiah was born of a priestly family of the tribe of Benjamin and his call to prophetic ministry came when he was young. In the year 626 BC, God called to Jeremiah saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." To which, Jeremiah reasonably responded, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." God then touched his mouth and the said, "Now I have put my words in your mouth." (1:5-9)

God called Jeremiah to prophesy about Jerusalem's imminent destruction by northern invaders. This would happen because Israel had been unfaithful to the laws of the covenant and had forsaken the Lord their God by worshiping another god. In doing so, Israel had broken the covenant, causing the Lord God to withdraw his blessings and protection. Jeremiah prophesied that the nation of Judah would face famine, be plundered, and taken captive by foreigners who would exile them to a foreign land. Which, of course, is precisely what happened.

And yet, while Jeremiah mournfully lamented Israel's fate, he also proclaimed God's everlasting love and coming redemption of his chosen people. In our lesson this morning, we hear of this promised restoration, that, from the faithful remnant, God's love will nurture and grow a great nation. From the wasteland of exile and death, the Lord God of creation will bring forth vibrant new life. Through Jeremiah, God reminds his desolate and displaced children of his pledge of love and joyful renewal of life, saying:

I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.  
Again I will build you, and you shall be built,  
O virgin Israel!  
Again you shall take your tambourines,  
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. (31:3-4)

Two days ago, we remembered Jesus' death. He died in a horrifying way that was truly unimaginable for the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, God's very own Son. Since then, his body has lain in a freshly hewn tomb, secured by a large stone, and guarded by Pilate's soldiers.

Early this morning, two devoted followers of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, went to the tomb. These women had stayed with Jesus throughout his crucifixion and death. They knew very well where the tomb was as they had accompanied Jesus' body and watched as he was laid there. Early this morning, they return to prepare his body for burial, but instead of finding a dead body, they witness the impossible.

The evangelist Matthew shows his flair for high drama in his account of this Easter morning scene. He alone of the other evangelists reports a great earthquake that shakes the ground – one that bookends nicely the earthquake at Jesus' death that accompanied the tearing of the temple curtain.

An angel descends from heaven, rolls back the stone in front of the tomb, and sits on it, all the while shining with blinding light. At this remarkable event, the Roman guards at the tomb understandably shake with deathly fear. The angel greets the women and announces that Jesus is no longer there; that he has been raised from the dead – come and see for yourself! – and now go tell the others that he has gone

ahead to Galilee. As the women leave the empty tomb with “fear and great joy,” Jesus himself appears before them and they drop to the ground, take hold of his feet, and worship him.

This is always a shocking story, yet perhaps we shouldn't be completely surprised by Easter...not really. If we've been paying attention to the events of the past seven days, we will realize that God's work of Easter is the perfect redemption of the human betrayal, violence, and death of Good Friday. Again, what man tears down, God raises up as renewed and resurrected life. These events demonstrate in the grandest way possible the fulfillment of God's promise that sin and death are restored and redeemed by love. And in the face of God's everlasting love and faithfulness, how can we do anything else but shake our tambourines and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers?

It is curious to me that true symbol of Easter is the empty tomb. Not eggs, bunnies, or candy, but an empty tomb – something much more elusive and mysterious. It is hard to capture emptiness – it can't really be depicted and it certainly cannot be domesticated. Emptiness is wild and uncontrollable – a vacuum is such a powerful force. This is one of the reasons that the fierce landscapes of the desert are always so frightening. There is nowhere to hide and nothing to see and, yet, powerful and invisible forces are most certainly present. Frederick Buechner describes the challenge of the symbolism of the empty tomb: “you can't make it into pageants and string it with lights. It doesn't move people to give presents to each other or sing of songs. It ebbs and flows all around us, the Eastertide. Even the great choruses of Handel's Messiah sound a little like a handful of crickets chirping under the moon.”

The emptiness of the tomb, in fact, may be the only way to truly capture the generative power of Easter. How else can we envision the divine depth and breadth of God's promised everlasting love for us? No created “thing” can encapsulate it; no “thing” can contain it. This emptiness is beautiful, terrifying, and glorious beyond measure. Encounter with the empty tomb will leave you forever changed – you are never the same person afterwards.

The empty tomb shows, perhaps in the way only it can, the boundless love God has for his Son and for his beloved creation. This love is a sacrificial love – it is a love that is a pouring out of oneself into the other; a full and complete giving and emptying of oneself for the beloved. In the grandest way, the empty tomb is a paradox wherein the symbol of the fullness of God's love and will is emptiness. In this divine emptiness of no-thing we may find every-thing for which our souls yearn. And from our encounter in this emptiness, we may go forth and rejoice, with dance and song, in our gift of renewed life reclaimed from death.

The question for today and this season of Easter is this: What shall we do with our resurrected lives? Sister Joan Chittister has written, “We do not sing ‘Alleluia’ today simply because Jesus rose from the dead but because, if we take Lent and Easter seriously, we have also risen with him, following his healing, blazing, shattering light to ignite it in his name where we are. Alleluia.” God has shown us his most holy and awe-some work: the bringing forth of joy and new life from the scattered remains of despair and death. As the children of God, ever loved by God, we share in this work, shining the light of Christ's love in the world and igniting this healing light wherever we may be. And we are called to demonstrate in our living and in our loving that sin and death have been and continue to be redeemed by God's everlasting love.

This morning, the empty tomb is the dramatic sign that the impossible has happened: Jesus has been risen and we also have risen with him. And our new home is found here – in the surprising joy and fullness of the empty tomb. We are no longer adrift on the shifting sands of sin and mortality but, impossibly, our lives are now rooted in the glorious emptiness of love. It is there that we find our true identities as people of the Resurrection. Alleluia, alleluia!

Amen.