Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.  

This is the word of our Lord…

Concluding our last of this sermon series on “Giving Up” for Lent, we come to the joyous celebration of Easter. Jesus has arisen from the dead and changed the dialogue about death forever. It is no longer going to be, he/she died - end of story, we know nothing more as humanity. Since the resurrection of Christ over 2,000 years ago, there have been new conversation points. Is death really the end for each of us? What really happened to Jesus? What does it mean that he died for our sins? How is it possible for anyone to come back to life? And so many more!

Being resurrected has far greater soul shaking paradigm shifting implications than the “being Born again” questions, and yet are similar in some ways. They both represent one manifestation of the self going away and something else returning - that something else has enough commonalities that is still recognized as being the same person, but something else has fundamentally changed - and it is understood that in terms of spiritual teachings, these changes are profoundly for the good. We usually think of birth as a positive step - and being born again bring nurturing thoughts of starting anew - with a fresh clean slate - a new person - born as a grown up. We have all been born at least once, and witnessed others being born - so we have a general perception of how that goes.

Being resurrected brings images of greater wisdom, power, something beyond any human experience; like the purity of a birth, but the life experience beyond the wisest of humans. Because those who have returned from death seem to have experienced eternity and have returned to show us that there is a great beyond - there is a God - and God craves our unity with “HIM” as much as we with long for “HIM”.

And because of the return of the spiritual leader, the Son of God and Son of Man, we can trust his life and teachings, his compassion and his calling for justice all the more. So that now, we can focus on this beloved soul, trust Jesus, and strive to live like he wanted us to.

In a recent interview from the actor who played Simon Peter in the movie A.D. which is on TV these days, he was talking about how he played the scene where Jesus said he was going to die. This actor said he looked at it like how he would respond when his “best mate” would be saying these things and the emotion for the film just flowed from there.

Easter can be a routine thing. We gather here, we sing the same songs, we have the flowers, we say he is risen . . . and Jesus our LORD becomes a part of the ritual as well. Believing in the resurrection can become a part of the church dogma and not a personal experience. I wonder if that could change, if we imagined going through what Peter did with our very best friend. I think it may not be so hard. How many of us have watched as ones closest to our hearts suffered and died? How many can still feel the loss and the pain?
Imagine now, knowing that they are in total carefree bliss with the most precious sacred parts of life - what we call God?
Imagine instead of pain in memory of the loss, we were strong enough to feel joy over all the times we had with that soul, and treasured the feelings of loss as a badge of honor for what we had gained from their being a part of our lives?
I think of my Dad whenever I cook certain recipes, or recall some of his jokes. Whenever I have a house full of company and we are laughing and slightly chaotic - I think of my Grandmother who just got happier as each of her 6 children and dozens of grandchildren would be filing in and things would begin to get wild! They live again in every moment that reminds me of them! They are a part of me, and I rejoice in that awareness.

And when we do the same with Jesus - when we treasure all he said and did, and we find ourselves doing what he lived, we can rejoice that he has been resurrected in us. His truth is eternal and cannot ever lose its power.

Another aspect of resurrection is that it totally redefines time. What used to seem like a lifetime had come to an end . . . the end idea must change. The universe knew Jesus to be dead. Thought that was the end. Found that what we thought was the end, was not. Jesus was a part of eternity, and showed us that if we belong to him, we can be too.

So, when we are earth, while we are still alive, have moments where we think we can go on no more - or there are no more answers, or the pain is too great - or life is just against us . . . for all those moments in our lives when we could see no alternatives or solutions - the resurrection totally blows those thoughts out of the water. There is nothing impossible to recover from in faith. Because in faith - in communion with God - we are already in eternity. We are in connection with the most profound aspects of life.

Jesus the teacher from Nazareth, became Jesus the Christ as a result of his resurrection. He became more poignant to this earth as a result of his life after death. His teachings took on superhuman status and our desire to connect our lives with him is a way for us to attach ourselves to a greatness that will lift us up so we can fully practice our lives.
So giving up death as the final step in our Lenten journey 2015 means we give up the idea that anything can stop us from connecting to the most meaningful experience of this life we have. It means knowing that the loved one we have lost are still with us - a part of our cells - a part of our minds and souls and they will never be fully removed from us.

Giving up death means we can connect with each other and with the sacred ~ unconstrained by fear and lack of knowledge. Death is a limit. A perceived ultimate limit. Giving up death is giving up limits, fear, human limitations.

So let us embrace this day with all we have! Dive into the wonder of limitlessness! The glory of oneness in Christ and ultimate love of all! Let us truly say, “Christ is Risen, He has risen indeed!” And then let us go out and live our lives as though we know that in loving Christ, we have inherited his limitedlessness! We can love people from beyond the grave and beyond what we thought were borders! In Christ, there is no one we can’t love, comfort, reach, learn from, teach, dance and laugh with! Because of Christ’s resurrection we can all have a life of abundance in joy and wisdom! Because of Easter we can always be born anew and touch the universe in prayer and also through our human connections! Giving up death is giving up the borders of our understanding of our selves and God. So let us be people of the resurrection!

CHRIST IS RISEN! He is risen indeed! Amen.