

THE LIGHT WILL FIND YOU

Luke 24:1-12

April 5, 2026

My college advisor was a giant. The late E.P. Sanders was legendary among twentieth-century Biblical scholars. He was brilliant and rigorous. His classes were demanding. A very tough "A." His lectures brought the New Testament world from the page all the way into the classroom. Professor Sanders was raised a Methodist in small-town Texas but described himself as a secularized Protestant. A historian, not a theologian. He insisted that we, who were his students, read the texts as academics, not disciples.

On sabbatical last summer, looking for something else—isn't that the way it always happens—I found his lecture on the resurrection. It was the last class of the semester. Here's what my brilliant professor said:

"That Jesus' followers had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What reality gave rise to these experiences I do not know. Nothing is more mysterious than the stories of his resurrection, which attempt to portray an event the authors could not themselves comprehend."

I love that. The great scholar and seasoned skeptic stands before the empty tomb and sets down his tools. *I have no category for this.* Knowledge and history can take you all the way to the door of this mystery, but they will not lead you through it.

This morning, in pulpits everywhere, earnest preachers will attempt—using the very best skills they have—to explain what happened on Easter morning. They will try to make it sensible, to make it manageable, to make it reasonable. And I understand that impulse. This is the Super Bowl of the church year. And on any Sunday, preaching is part persuasion. I would love to give you proof. I would love to offer evidence. I would love to close this message with the words "case closed."

But I fear those messages will fail. If we reduce Easter to an equation we can solve, we miss it. The impulse is backward. We do not explain Easter. Easter explains us. It explains me.

When I was seventeen years old, seated in Dr. Sanders' class, I had a map. That map took me to law school. To Washington D.C. To public office. To a career I could manage and measure. I wanted to be someone who mattered, to do something that felt big, significant, important. And then—not once, but many times, over and again—that plan was interrupted. A campus minister whose faith rekindled mine. A tiny church way out in the country where I watched a seasoned pastor sit with a dying man and somehow knew I wanted to be in that room. I wanted to be that person. A professor who saw something in me I couldn't yet see. I turned away many times. I wasn't looking for this. The light found me anyway.

And so, while I cannot explain the truth that lies at the heart of Easter, I do believe it. I believe it with all my heart. I trust it with everything I have. I believe that in Jesus Christ, God has defeated death and is making all things new, including us.

Professor Sanders taught me to read the text as a scholar, but this morning I stand before you as a witness.

On Easter morning, the women got there first. They show up at the tomb with their spices and their grief, a crushing weight on their backs. You may not be able to fix death, but at least you can perfume it. You can make it decent. Please note that they were not seeking the living. They came to preserve a decaying body. They came at deep dawn, that thin, trembling hour between darkness and light when you are not sure what kind of

world you live in, when people are just shapes on the horizon. In that dim light, the graveyard was the one place that made sense to them. Dead people stay dead. That's the rule.

And there, in that place of grief and certainty, they get hit with a staggering question. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?*

The irony is biting here. They weren't looking at all. They were hiding. They were the ones being found that morning. But before they can even gather themselves to answer, those dazzling messengers press on. *Not here. Risen. Remember. He told you.* And they do remember. They remember, and in that moment, the world is reconfigured. Their lives are transformed. Before they are preachers, they are witnesses. They trust the promise enough to run and tell the others.

The scholar stands at the door of the tomb and stops. The women stand at the door and believe. They stake their lives on it. This is the grammar of resurrection: we don't find Easter; Easter finds us. Let me show you how I know.

Last Sunday, after church, some of the kids here at Second did what they do lots of Sundays after church. They played a great big game of hide-and-seek here in the sanctuary. Someone told me after the early worship service this morning that he tried to start a professional hide-and-seek team, but good players are hard to find...

Watching those kids in this sanctuary took me way, way back. When I was eight years old, my dad served a small two-hundred-year-old church in rural North Carolina farm country. On Sunday nights, the most faithful members of that church would gather in the sanctuary for a prayer meeting. And while the adults prayed in the sanctuary, all the kids who belonged to those adults played hide-and-seek all over the church building. As the pastor's kid, I had an unfair advantage. I knew the perfect hiding space. Up in the balcony of that sanctuary, there was a long, pitch-black hallway that led nowhere. To get into the hallway, you had to go through a tiny door, just a hole in the wall, off the balcony. So, one

Sunday night, I crawled down that hallway, deep into the darkness, and there I waited.

I relished in the hushed laughter I heard as all of the others were found one by one. And I remember thinking to myself, "They will never find me here. They will never find me here."

And then it hit me. *They will never find me here.*

And suddenly that darkness, that once protected me, closed in around me. The silence grew heavy, and I realized the perfect hiding place was a self-made prison. And so, after what felt like a very long time (sure I had won the game), I crept back toward the door. I cracked the door open. Then I opened it wider, and just before I began to stamp my feet, there he was. My best friend Jonathan Williams ("it"). *I found you, Chris.*

I pretended to be disappointed. I was not disappointed. I was relieved. I was elated. Hiding was fun for a little while, but then I wanted nothing more than to be found. I wanted to be sought out. I wanted to be called by name. *I found you, Chris.*

I think you know that feeling. On Easter Sunday, we come here because something stubborn and resilient in our souls wants to be found. *I see you. I see you.* Some of you came in carrying grief so heavy it has started to feel like your permanent address—a person, a marriage, a future you had counted on that simply is not coming. A goal, a plan that has slipped through your hands. You have learned to carry that grief quietly. And you're pretty good at it. But it's there. I see you.

I see you. Some of you are frightened in ways you struggle to name. The world feels untethered. The institutions you trusted are crumbling or captured. And there's something more menacing than that, something we must name. You hear the name of Jesus Christ invoked to justify cruelty—to the refugee, the poor, the vulnerable, the enemy—and it is doing something to us. It's doing something to our faith. Not just our politics. Our faith. Because when the gospel language is weaponized against those Jesus spent his life embracing, some part of us breaks. We hide our hope

because it feels too fragile to expose. We conceal our faith because we simply don't want to be associated with such hatred. We wonder if God has stopped paying attention. I see you.

I see you. Some of you came here today because you were invited, and to be honest, you are not sure you believe any of this. You're just stopping by, just looking in, just trying it out, just this once, just one more chance. You are sitting in that pew right now wondering what you are doing here. Maybe you've never really believed and aren't even sure you want to. Maybe Easter brunch starts in an hour, and this came first. Maybe you're here because something in you needed to sit in this space. Just in case. You are not alone in that hiding place.

Remember, when Easter arrived, the whole world was hiding. The disciples: scattered, fearful, hiding behind locked doors. The city: quiet, deserted. Everyone's doing what we do when hope dies: head down, heart closed. That's not just your story. It is the human story. We are not the first people to stand at this threshold wondering if the word of life is nothing more than an idle tale.

Easter dares to breathe a promise into that darkness. The promise is this: *You are not lost beyond finding.*

Resurrection. You know, the early Christians had a word for it. *Anastasis*: an uprising, the refusal to stay buried, the refusal to keep quiet. Yes, the cross was supposed to be the end because dead people stay dead. And the empire always kills. But God raises, and in raising Jesus Christ, he begins the undoing of death itself. An uprising. That's what the women ran to tell the others, breathless and terrified and the gospel's first preachers. An uprising had begun. They ran to tell the disciples. And I am here to tell you it has not ended yet.

It is funny what you remember from when your kids were little. When he was three years old, our son Benjamin loved hide-and-seek. But the truth is, he was terrible at it. Probably the worst hider I've ever played with. And you know why. He could not wait to be found. Here's how it would happen. I would start counting, and he would run and hide behind the couch,

obvious place. I would finish counting, and as soon as I declared I was looking, he would start squealing with delight, completely giving himself away. But what I remember is scooping him up, both of us laughing until tears were flowing. For Ben, hiding was just the setup. Being found was the whole point.

There is a reason I remember that. It is what I want. It's what we all want, underneath everything. And so, I cannot explain it, and I will not try. But, by God, I have *seen* it.

Listen. The uprising begins again today. Because he is coming out of that tomb, and he is coming for *you*. He has been coming for you since before you knew you needed him, and he is not stopping, and he will not stop.

The one who transforms every ending is still writing your story. He will not leave you in the darkness where he found you. He is closer than you think. He knows your name. He loves you.

The scholar stands at the door and stops—that's where he leaves us. The women stand at the door and something in them says *yes*. The college kid sets down the perfect plan and steps through. And you—here you are. In a room like this. On a morning like this.

The story says the tomb is empty. The map is useless. You no longer need to hide. Ready or not.