



Roanoke, Virginia

Easter Sunday

April 5, 2026

“Peter at the Tomb”

On This Rock a Lenten Sermon Series Part VII

John 20:1-10

George C. Anderson

Today we celebrate the empty tomb.

Today is a *“Now and Forever”* celebration,
where we proclaim the astonishing news that

- Christ is risen from the dead—
- sin is defeated and
- and death has lost its sting.

The vestments are white
because the bright light of eternity
breaks through all that stands between God and us.

So, is it a shame that it is raining on Easter Sunday?
Or should anyone feel out of place

- if they cannot set aside, even for today,
the strains of everyday life?
- Or if they carry doubts
about what we celebrate?



- Or if they are carrying burdens that will not wait— sorrows or fears that do not pause for Easter morning, a change in life they do not yet know how to bear?
- Or wonder whether their faith is strong enough for a day like this?

Simon Peter is to be welcome at an Easter service, then the answer must be “No.”

To see why, we turn first to his discovery of the empty tomb— and then, for a moment, to something more familiar.



John 20:1-10:

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. ² 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.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

With Easter Sunday, we reach the climax of the church year. For that reason, it is often said of memorial services, like the three we soon will have in his sanctuary, that they are their own Easter celebrations. Ken, Lewis and Bob

- made mistakes,
- needed to be forgiven,
- sometimes got things wrong,

yet lived long, good and faithful lives. And at their lives’ end,
we celebrate that sin and death are left behind,
and they live in their eternal home.

Which is beautiful. And true.



But Easter is not only an ending. It is also a beginning. It is the celebration of something already true—even as we are still learning to live into it.

And that is why it may help to think not only of memorial services but also of joyful weddings.

I have visited the homes of many couples long wed. I have seen the pictures on their walls and furniture, and in their wedding albums-

- the white dress,
- the tuxedo,
- the gathered family and friends.

I imagine how for that wedding weekend so long ago, the stresses and troubles of everyday life were largely forgotten and those gathered surrendered themselves to the joy of laughing, dancing, sharing stories and celebrating vows meant to be kept till death do they part.

Till death do they part.

That line names the weight of the hope for marriage. It gives the moment that sense of *now and forever*.

And yet—every marriage is lived by ordinary people.

- People who face stress.
- People who make mistakes.
- People who sometimes wonder whether they can keep the promises they made so confidently at the beginning.

Everything is arranged for those flawed people to say those *always* vows.

- The music.
- The clothes.
- The gathering of people.

All of it points to something lasting.

And then there is that moment—
right before the vows are spoken.
Everything grows quiet.

And if we are honest,
for some standing there holding shaking hands...
or some sitting in the pews—



there is a question that flickers, even if only for a second:

Can anyone really promise this?

Can anyone really live this?

Not because the love isn't real.

Not because the moment isn't beautiful.

But because life is long.

And we know ourselves.

And yet—the vows are still spoken.

And over time,

in the marriages that last,

those vows are grown into.

Love deepens beyond the romantic

into something steadier—

a love that forgives, endures,

and sometimes carries

the weight of doubt.



That's Peter even on Easter morning.

During Lent, we have been with him on this journey to the empty tomb and we've gotten to know him well. We have empathy for him because we identify with him.

- He loves Jesus-- but not perfectly.
- He is capable
 - of deep loyalty
 - and painful failure,
 - of courage
 - and lack of nerve.
- He gets much right—
 - but never everything right.
- He is capable of standing up for what he believes is true and what is right,
 - and capable of slinking away when fear overwhelms his faith.

And here he is at the empty tomb.



He sees the linen wrappings.
He sees the body is gone.

And somewhere in that moment—
he believes.

But the scripture tells us something important:
he does not yet understand.

The truth is real to him.
But its meaning is still unfolding.
And Peter will go on living into that truth.

Next Sunday, Elizabeth will tell of how he will return to fishing and Jesus must call him again. The book of Acts will show us Peter leading the church.
and leading it well-

- Preaching powerful sermons that open thousands of hearts to God's grace,
- offering a healing ministry,
- not shrinking away when confronted by powers wanting to silence him...
but also still needing to learn how wide is the grace of God,
that Gentiles who will not become Jews can become Christian.

The resurrection has arrived
but Peter is still on the journey
Not because the resurrection is uncertain,
but because Peter is still becoming.

Yes, Peter belongs here—
not because he understood everything,
not because he never doubted,
not because he got it all right.

Peter belongs here because he believes before understanding all that it means.
He believes even as he is still becoming.



And that brings us back to this day.

We belong here—
you and I.



- Whether our faith feels strong or uncertain,
- whether our life feels settled or unresolved,
- whether we are celebrating with confidence
or simply hoping something true might still meet us.

Easter is not just a celebration at the end of a journey,
It is a celebration at the beginning too.

Easter does not require that our faith be complete or our life be resolved. It declares something that is true before we fully understand it:
that Christ is risen—
for all of us.

When we leave this place today, we will return to our everyday lives.

- The burdens will still be there.
- The questions may still remain.

But we will carry with us this truth: Christ is risen.
Even as we are still learning
what it means.

He is risen.
He is risen indeed.
Hallelujah. Amen.

