

[PRAYER] [BLANK] Happy Easter! Welcome everyone, everyone who wants to rejoice in Jesus Christ, our Lord, our God, our Savior, rising from the dead! We welcome everyone to the good news of the greatest event in all of God’s world. We welcome everyone, and we invite you now to welcome people sitting next to you, by turning to them, and saying, “Christ is risen, indeed!” [PEOPLE TURN] Thank you, and bless you; you are doing what all Christians must do with our lives. We must all proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, our risen God, our risen Lord, to the world. Feels good, doesn’t it?

Together, we have all just proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. I suppose that I should just quit while I am ahead, right? Why press my luck? The truth, though, is that we here not just to proclaim the fact of the good news of the risen Jesus. No, I press on here today, because my real job today is to help us understand why, in the twenty-first century, a world of facts, a world of “whats,” why in this world we need to accept not just the “whats” of Easter, but the “whos” of Easter. And there are three “whos” who matter in Easter: you; God; and everyone here, and in God’s world.

The “whos” of Easter matter more than ever, because of this world that tries to make everything a “what.” The Internet, TV, and other media surround us with “whats” every moment of the day. This world of “whats” turns everything alive into little more than meat, or packaging for meat. Working people are now “human resources.” Sounds like something you buy in a fertilizer store, doesn’t it? Science, as good and as useful as it is, turns everything into data. If it’s not a number, it’s not real. When the great cathedral of Paris, Notre Dame, was damaged horribly in a fire last week, I heard lots of talk about the “whats” of that place. But few, if any, news reports, dared to mention God, the “who” of Notre Dame. To them, it was just a “what.”

Life isn’t really about the “whats,” is it? You can ask Google how many days you’ve lived, and how many heartbeats you’ve had in those days, and how many times you’ve breathed in those days, but that data won’t tell you what life is about. No way. Life is more than what we can count. Life is more than what we can fit into our heads, because we’re all not just little computers, running around with information about “whats” in God’s world. No, we are alive, and our lives are more than just “whats.” Our lives are stories, filled with living “whos.” just as God’s creation itself is a story, made, and lived in, by the living God.

For the sake of this world of “whats,” though, let’s look at the facts. [CHURCH] In 2016, some of the best scientists in the world started to examine the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church, in Jerusalem, is revered as the place where Jesus was crucified, and buried in a stone grave. When Jesus was crucified, it was a place called Golgotha, meaning, the place of the skulls. It was a quarry just outside Jerusalem, a place where people could easily see people being killed by the Romans, and bury them.

The site was filled in by the Romans not many years later, to hide it from Christians, under a pagan temple. When the Romans became Christians, they tore down the temple and built a church over the cross and the grave. In the era of science, many people doubted that this was actually the place where Jesus was buried. [SHRINE] And

then, just a few years ago, scientists were asked to restore the shrine in the church over the grave of Jesus.

[WORKERS] These scientists made three important discoveries. First, they discovered that underneath much later construction, there was, in fact, a stone tomb, carved out of rock, just as described in the Bible. [BED] And when they had to lift up the stone that covered the place where Jesus was laid, they made another discovery: the bed of Jesus was still there, right under another stone that had been cemented to it. They analyzed the cement, and it was from the time when the Romans had first sealed the bed. It appears that the tomb of Jesus is real. It is a fact.

[PRAYING] The tomb is real, but that is not what brings people to the tomb. Not really. The tomb is a “what.” No, people come there, not for a “what,” but for a “who.” They come there, because of the “who” we know as Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of Humanity. They come, because of the saving love of a God who could never be just a “what,” and always a “who.” The Jesus who walked on earth is gone. But the “who” on this earth who was fully God, and fully human, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead there. People don’t worship a stone, or a body. They worship the living God, the risen Jesus, who lived with us, and as us, heaven on earth, walking around. [BLANK]

On that first Easter morning, while it was still very dark, some women went to that stone tomb of Jesus, expecting to anoint his dead body. They were shocked to find that the tomb was open! Mary Magdalene, one of the most devoted followers of Jesus, went running back to where the other disciples were, and told them this frightening news. Peter and John, two other deeply devoted followers of Jesus, went running to the tomb to see what had happened. They entered the tomb, and found nothing but the cloth that Jesus had been buried in. All they found were “whats.” They believed, John’s gospel tells us, but they only really believed that the body of Jesus wasn’t there; they didn’t yet believe that Jesus could be risen.

So John and Peter went back to where they were staying in Jerusalem. But Mary Magdalene stayed behind. She didn’t care about the “whats.” She cared about her “who,” Jesus, her beloved teacher, and her God, who lived in Jesus, as Jesus. She was confused, She was frightened. She was very, very sad. But she was, above all else, in love with the “who” she had followed, and served, even to his death on a cross. This Jesus was more than “whats.” This Jesus turned “whats” into “whos” everywhere he could. He healed the sick. He taught people how to forgive, and be forgiven, restoring love, dignity, and justice. He walked on water. He even raised dead people back to life. To Jesus, “whats” were just things waiting to be alive, in God.

And so, Mary Magdalene, who loved the living God in Jesus so very much, bent down, and took one last look into the tomb of Jesus. And there, she didn’t find “whats”: she found “whos.” Two angels, dressed in white, sat on the bed in the tomb. These eternal “whos” from our God spoke to Mary, and asked her, “Why are you crying?” The tomb couldn’t provide answers to Mary. Instead, these angels provided Mary with a question. Why weep? Mary, don’t you already know the “who” who will answer you?

And so, Mary Magdalene, stood up, and turned around. And there, through her tears, she saw a man, someone, maybe a gardener. And this person, a “who,” asked Mary: “Who are you looking for?” “Who?” Who are you looking for, Mary, asked Jesus? Who are we looking for, today, my friends and family in Christ? Who? Christ is risen. Jesus is right in front of us, and we don’t even recognize him, just as Mary didn’t at first, as so many people didn’t see Jesus for who he was. Jesus is with us, here, in this place, right now, waiting for us, like Mary, to change our point of view, and to hear Jesus calling our name. Who are you looking for? That is the one who you will find, today, and always.

Oh, I forgot to tell you the third thing that those scientists found in the tomb of Jesus. Their scientific instruments didn’t work there. Try as they might, they worked fine just outside of it, but failed to work in it. Maybe they’ll figure out the problem, some day. The problem isn’t with the instruments, of course. There isn’t a problem with the “whats” of the risen Jesus. The problem is with us denying the “who” of the risen Jesus. We are the “whos” of God’s world, called, by our faith in Jesus Christ, to hear the call of Jesus in our hearts, the “whos” who are called to proclaim the living “who” of the risen Jesus to all of God’s world, the “whos” called by God to stop treating ourselves and God’s world like “whats,” to wipe away the tears of being treated like “whats,” and to find the courage, the hope, the assurance, deep in our hearts, that Jesus lives in our hearts, to find the stone of death rolled away from our hearts, now, and forever, so that our hearts may be filled with Jesus, so that our lungs may shout for joy in Jesus, and so that God’s world may be covered with the saving love of Jesus, as we are transformed in God’s Holy Spirit by the Easter sunlight of the risen Jesus! You, our God, and all of God’s world, we are all alive, in Jesus! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Glory to the risen Christ, our God, our savior, now, and forever! Halleluia! Amen!