**Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014; Acts 10:34-43; Ps 118; Col 3:1-4; Matt 28:1-10; Rev. Mary Trainor**

The scene was amazing to watch, and it drew you in as you watched it. There were trees, but they were purple and the leaves were the size of elephants. Colors were swirling around like the northern lights. Figures appeared from behind the leaves and they were otherworldly, eerie - you were fearful yet curious about them. As they spoke you wanted to know more, to escape from where you are and go to where they are -- even for a little while, even if it was a bit risky. This is a scene of you (and me) watching a fun fantasy show or movie....and we are drawn in. Did you know that in our culture right now, fantasy is more popular than at any other time in history. Whether it be Thor or X-Men, Superman or Frozen, Twilight or the Hobbit -- we like it. We look for adventure in secret kingdoms, special superpower abilities, scary scenes, and amazing creatures. Why are we so drawn to this? Don't we have better things to do? Well, it turns out that research shows that fantasy, more than any other form of entertainment, unlocks us, releases us, it frees us. It pushes out the boundaries of what we know and what we think is possible, and moves us into an imaginary world. And, in the process, it temporarily moves us out of our real world and our stress level goes down.

So right now, put yourself into this particular scene. You are out in a dry rocky place, surrounded by dry brown grass and cactus. You are coming down a dirt road with others, and around you are just a few people with horse-drawn carts laden with goods going to market. You approach a hilly area with a big rock wall that has several large niches carved into it -- the niches are tightly covered with large rocks. There are two stern guards on either side of the wall. All of a sudden the ground shakes violently and you throw yourself to the ground, in part from fear and in part from self-protection. You don't know what is going on, as you have never experienced anything like this -- wait, you now realize this must be an earthquake. The ground stopped shaking, and finally so do you. You are now able to look around at the rock wall, and you see that one of the large rocks has been rolled away. There is a hole in the rock wall, and you see there is nothing in there. The guards, who had looked paralyzed a minute ago, now are running away from fear. Beside the hole is a wild figure that almost blinds you with a bright light. Once your eyes adjust, you see this is like no person you have ever seen -- in fact this white figure is floating, with wings on his back. This figure says to you, "***Do not be afraid."*** Right. Ok. Well, the voice is reassuring and calm, so you maybe actually believe him -- and look up again....and see what is next.

Fantasy indeed, what a scene this must have been. It sounds very unreal, like all those movies. But I am here to tell you today that this scene is not like the movies or videogames -- it is real, and it is for you. That place where you were standing was next to the empty tomb, where the bright white angel from God tells you not to be afraid. This is today's Gospel. And, is will bring you new life and meaning in your life -- a lot more than a temporary lowering of stress in your life.

But it's not over. What happens next in this scene is that you are told that Jesus, the Messiah, who was dead in the tomb and is now alive has "***gone ahead of you."***Jesus has gone ahead of you! This is a huge deal. Jesus is THE MESSIAH, the divine person who came to liberate you from what holds you down, what stresses you out. So, tomorrow and the next day and the next day, whatever you have ahead of you, Jesus has gone ahead of you -- to prepare the way, to prepare you, to be with you no matter what. We are in a culture that is fearful of the future, that is one reason we hide in fantasy so much -- but because of Jesus we don't have to fear the future. Jesus has "gone ahead of you."

So you go back on that dusty road and journey toward Galilee. And as you go, open to what might happen next, poof -- Jesus appears before you. You see Jesus, not as before and yet as before. He is very much alive, still looks like the Jesus you knew, but unlike before He is glowing with a comforting light and His hands and feet and side show deep wounds.

He looks straight at you, and says, "***Greetings***." He looks straight at you, and melt down to the earth -- your melting this time is not from fear or shock but rather from pure joy. You sense a flowing, swirling, all encompassing, warm, complete love for you. You know with confidence inside yourself that this love is real, this love is just for you as you are right now, and you don't have to do anything to earn it. You just have to receive it, bask in it, take it, live in it.

It's Easter Sunday. The truth of this day is that Jesus really did die on the cross and rose to life again after three days, and He is alive today for you. This is truth that leaves us different than we were before. It brings us to a new place, a better reality. ***T*oday** your life begins anew! This is Jesus' plan for you, and that is why He went through all of that -- for you! Now, you might expect me this morning to explain how this exactly works: to explain to you and clarify and demystify the resurrection for you. But, I cannot do that because it is a holy mystery; it is a mystery that we cannot comprehend. But it is the truth. Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "**Christ did not come into this world so that we might understand Him, but that we might cling to Him in order to be caught up in the immense event of the Resurrection." The Ressurection is an immense event that is real, the truth, and Good News for you.** Will you chose to live into the truth of the Resurrection, allowing God to love you, to change you, to satisfy your deepest hungers, to go before you? If you do you will live with less fear, more fulfillment, more patience, more sincere. Here at St. John's we have all kinds of wonderful ways to help you get connected to Jesus. Church is not a building, but a community in which we are aided in growth in our relationship with Jesus Christ.The Risen Christ is available for you 24/7, 7 days a week, 265 days a year. Our closing hymn this morning we sing "**The Strife is Over....the victory of life is won. Alleluia."** With the resurrection of Jesus, you are offered freedom and victory. Will you grasp the truth of this for you? Amen.