

**Easter Sunday 2026**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas**  
**5 April 2026**

I am thinking about the wisdom of the resurrection stories in the four canonical gospels and how each of them preach a slightly different sequence of events that best reflects their individual theological viewpoints, and today, I would like to compare them to a fifth gospel, so called The Gospel of Peter, which is not in our Bible. The fragments of this account of the resurrection were only found in by a French archeological team in Northern Egypt in the year 1886-87.

All the four biblical Gospels tell us that there were women at the tomb on the day of resurrection. In Matthew we see Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, but he doesn't tell us who this other woman was. Mark gives us a bit more information as he mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, which may be the Virgin Mary or another Mary, depending who the James mentioned is, and Salome. Luke gives us new characters the other two do not give us. He mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and other women. John gives us Mary Magdalene only.

Of the four, only Matthew mentions that there were guards at the tomb. Only John says that the visit from Mary Magdalene took place when it was still dark, for the other three the day was dawning or the sun had risen. For Matthew, the stone covering the tomb was not rolled away miraculously, but rather an earthquake rolls away the stone, the other three do not mention an earthquake. Only John avoids a reason why the women (woman) visit the tomb, the other three say the reason was to visit the tomb (to mourn) or to anoint the body properly. Only Luke and John have one or more disciples at the tomb. Only John has Peter going into the tomb.

Only Matthew and John have the women meet the resurrected Jesus, but each has a different dialogue. In Luke the women are told to have the disciples go to Galilee and Jesus will meet them there. In John, Jesus cannot be touched until he ascends to the Father, after which he will return to meet the brothers. Mark does not give us a first post resurrection appearance to the disciples, but the other three have different settings of this first appearance. For Matthew, it was at a mountain in Galilee. For Luke, it was on the road to the village of Emmaus. In John, it was in a locked room in Jerusalem, where they were hiding for fear of the Judeans, and Thomas was not with the group. Only John gives us the appearance a week later when Thomas is invited to inspect Jesus' wounds. Only John gives us the appearance at the Sea of Tiberias where Jesus cooks breakfast for the disciples. Finally, only Luke gives us the episode of the ascension of Jesus to the Father.

So what do we make of the differences between these four Gospels? It is important to know that the evangelists were not attempting to write history as we know it today. Rather, they gathered the oral stories about the resurrection that had been circulating in their communities for forty or fifty years since the events took place. The accounts are different because each community remembers the events in accordance with their own oral stories. Each story corresponds to the theology that unites the community as a body of disciples of Jesus. In a way, they engaged in historical analysis. Their stories confirm the Christian faith in the resurrection, a fundamental story of the faith dating back to the earliest days. When we read these gospels, we often get an answer to a different question than the question we tend to ask: We ask, “What happened?” But the Evangelists are answering other questions: “How did it happen? Why did it happen? And What do these events mean to us?” These are ultimately stories of the faith of each of these communities.

What is common to these stories is that Jesus died by crucifixion, he suffered greatly during his passion, he was buried in a tomb, he rose from the dead three days later, he appeared to one or more women, he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, and the disciples had a deep belief in his living presence among them to the ends of the ages. We summarize these common beliefs in the formulas, “Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia!” and the formula, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!” This is the core of our faith. Without the resurrection of Christ, we remain in our sin, and we are left to our own devices, alone in the world, irreconcilably separated from God.

A deep and abiding belief in the resurrection is necessary because it shows us that God loves us deeply and has not left us orphaned. The resurrection shows us that God remains on the side of humanity as the God with us, to the ends of the world. We now have an empathic Messiah who has suffered as we suffer and who stands on the side of humanity. And this is the difference between the resurrected Jesus of the biblical Gospels and the Jesus presented by other gospels left out of our Bible. Let me introduce you to the resurrection in the Gospel of Peter.

“When the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding). And while they were relating what they had seen, again they see three males who have come out from the sepulcher, with the two

supporting the other one, and a cross following them, and the head of the two reaching unto heaven, but that of the one being led out by a hand by them going beyond the heavens. And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, 'Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep?' And an obeisance was heard from the cross, 'Yes.'"

In the canonical Gospels Jesus appears to the disciples, cares for their grief, makes himself known to them and allows them to touch him, feeds them and eats with them, teaches and shows them how all Scripture points to him, and encourages them to faith by promising the advent of his Holy Spirit, which will remain with the congregations to the end of the ages.

In the Gospel of Peter, on the other hand, the resurrected Jesus does not retain his human appearance, but rather, his figure stretches beyond the skies. He does not appear to his disciples, and the angel who appears to Mary Magdalene and the other women does not order that they bring a message to the brothers. In fact, there is no mention that Jesus will meet them later. The portion we have ends with Peter and his brother going back to fishing and to their former life. There is no mention of any post-resurrection appearances to the disciples and there is no promise of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the only command to "proclaim" has been given to the cross, which now is a living, breathing, talking cross.

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of the Son of God and we give thanks that the Biblical Jesus remains with us as one of us. He remains human even after his resurrection, although he now bears a different kind of humanity, the same humanity we aspire to have after our own resurrection. He remains and still commissions his friends to tell the story and to make disciples. He remains a suffering servant who through his passion and resurrection bridges the gap of separation between humanity and God. He remains the Paschal Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He does not despise his humanity after the resurrection, but, rather, he puts on the true humanity God created, as it was always meant to be.

Today, we give thanks that our Messiah lives, not as a formless giant who leaves us completely after his resurrection, but as a relatable Messiah who chooses to remain with us when we need him the most. Today, we celebrate that "Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again." And we voice this gratitude with the traditional acclamation, "Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, Indeed, Alleluia!" May he continue to bless you. Amen!