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## *The Tomb is a Tunnel!*

**A sermon by Dean Sam Candler**  
**Easter Day – Year C**

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*  
*The Lord is risen indeed!*

Have any of you ever been in a tunnel?

Two weeks ago, I was trekking through several tunnels. I was with a group of you, fifteen Cathedral parishioners, on a spiritual pilgrimage to Israel and Jerusalem. A special feature of this year's pilgrimage was tunnels. We walked in a lot of tunnels, tunnels that had served as water supplies, escape routes, and attack routes – but also tunnels that were modern archeological digs.

We walked through walls of sheer rock, and along long stretches of limestone, deep in the underground of Jerusalem, below bedrock in some places. We walked through some tunnels that had been hewn out by hand tools of the Canaanites. Other tunnels were constructed by Hezekiah and various Hebrew kings. Still others were the result of archaeology, present explorations into our past.

Our footing was precarious and uncertain. We stumbled along rocky ridges and unexpected slopes. Often the rock beneath our feet was wet, always slippery, and sometimes full of water puddles. Underground, we rarely knew exactly where we were. We could not hear the world above us, and our tunnels made unexpected turns and dives.

I am telling you all this, I am describing those rocky tunnels to you on Easter morning, because being in those tunnels felt like being in a rocky tomb. Walking deep in those Jerusalem tunnels felt like I was walking in a tomb. The walls were tight and dark, and I had no idea where I was.

I wonder if Jesus felt like that, when he was in a tomb, when he was in a tomb for three days. In Jerusalem, we visited some actual tombs, and some reproductions of tombs, and though they differed from each other, most were simply rocky caves, carved from the Israel limestone. All were dark and rocky. One rock may have been the actual rock where Jesus rested his head for three days.

Except I don't think Jesus lay still for those three days he was in the tomb. I think he was walking. He was on pilgrimage, seeking and searching and exploring just like I was when I was in Israel two weeks ago.

There were fifteen of us on that pilgrimage, walking those tunnels, and I never heard anyone say they were afraid. That amazed me, because one of us was four years old, and another was seven; and whatever our ages were, we had every reason to be afraid. But there was something about our companionship that kept us unafraid. And there was certainly something about our guide—a modern day Virgil! A Beatrice!—who kept us brave and curious, not scared and hesitant.

There are some of us here this morning—Easter morning!—there are some of us here this morning who are walking in similar tunnels. Perhaps you are in the middle of life's journey and in a forest dark, and perhaps you have lost that straight way. Maybe your life seems dark and the way is incredibly narrow—tight—and you don't know where you are going.

The rocky tunnel you are in may feel like a tomb. Maybe you didn't intentionally choose the tunnel you are in, but rather

you fell in unexpectedly. Maybe you did choose the tunnel you are in, but you can't figure out why you did. Maybe the rocky tomb you are in today is one that was created long ago, or maybe it was only recently discovered.

Whatever the case, that kind of rocky tunnel can feel like death. One definition of "death" is feeling like you have nowhere to go, feeling as if the earth itself has closed in around you. Death is feeling like there is no more path, no more freedom, no more light, nowhere else to go.

Today, Easter, is the opposite of that. Today, Easter, is the opposite of death. Today, Easter, is a day to remember an amazing thing about the tomb. The tomb of Jesus is not the end. It NOT the end of the path, NOT the end of freedom, NOT the end of light. The tomb of Jesus is not a rock barrier. The tomb is a tunnel.

The tomb is a tunnel! In Jerusalem two weeks ago, what felt to me like a tomb was really a tunnel! Yes, it had some scary qualities. It felt claustrophobic and dark. But it was going somewhere. I, and my fellow pilgrims, were travelling!

I think Jesus had companions in the tomb. There's no record of that, except that we read elsewhere in the Bible that Jesus—in his death—visited the souls of the dead (1 Peter 4). That is how we get our image that Jesus descended into hell, into the place of the dead. There, he provided saving companionship to those who thought their way had ended, to those who thought the rocky walls meant the end.

No, says Jesus, there is a way out. There is always a way out. The tomb is not the end! The tomb is a tunnel! There is always a way out, a way through the darkness and rock.

Two weeks ago, when I finally found the way out, when I emerged from that ancient Jerusalem tunnel, I was surprised. I had no idea where I was! First of all, because the sunlight was so bright, I couldn't see anything at all. Then, when my eyes did adjust to the light, I could not recognize what I did see. I knew I was in the holy city of Jerusalem, but where?

So it is when God leads any of us out of the tunnels of our lives. Most of the time, we do not expect, we cannot expect, where we will be when we get out. Even if we have been praying hard to escape the tunnels of our lives, praying hard to escape the tomb, we have no idea what this new life of resurrection will look like.

Often, when we do emerge from the tunnels of our lives, we don't recognize the holy land that we are standing on. We emerge in the holy city, but we don't know it.

But that is exactly why we call the resurrection something *new*! It was not the *old life* that Jesus was resurrected to; it was an entirely *new life*. It is not the old life we are resurrected to, it is an entirely *new life*! Many of us mistakenly want resurrection to the old life. We think resurrection magically restores all of the nostalgic great times and places of our memories.

If we are merely looking for the old to be restored in our lives, we will be disappointed. We will miss the true resurrection. That is why Mary, dear Mary Magdalene, who probably knew Jesus as well as any of the other apostles, dear Mary does not recognize the resurrected Jesus at first. She was expecting a resurrection of the old.

When Jesus was resurrected, he was new. The land around him was new. And Jesus made new the people around him, too. This morning, when we emerge from this church, when we walk out into the world celebrating resurrection, God wants to raise us to something new; God wants us to live into something new.

Can we do that? Our tunnels do not lead back to the way we came in. The tunnels of our lives will always, always, lead us to another place entirely, a new place, a place that we might not recognize at first.

The tomb is tunnel! Death is a tunnel! To walk the way of Jesus means that we do not, we cannot, avoid death. We don't walk around death, or over death. The way of Jesus is down and through death, through that tunnel first, and only then out the other side. On that other side, there awaits us a place that we might not recognize at first; but that's okay.

At that other side, God shows us liberating light, open space, bright glory. We call that other side—the other end of the tunnel—we call it Easter!

Happy Easter, fellow pilgrims, all of us who have walked with Jesus through the tunnels of life. Happy Easter! "Alleluia!"

Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!” And we are risen, too.

AMEN.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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