



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for the Easter Vigil

April 4, 2026

Expecting the Unexpected

Mark 16:1-8

¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

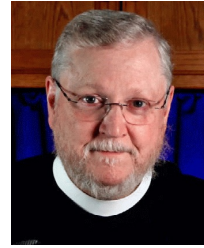
Jesus had died . . . Friday afternoon, about 3:00. The Sabbath was quickly approaching; there simply wasn't enough time to do everything they wanted to do to give Him a proper burial. So they did what they could, expecting to do the rest after the Sabbath. Now it was Sunday. The Sabbath over, the women rose early to go about their grim task.

As they approached the tomb, imagine their sadness . . . despair . . . the ache of loss – not just of a loved one, but of the One in whom they had placed their hope. Now their Hope had been taken away and they had in mind to do the only thing they could do for Him: finish what they started. No one could deprive them of that – or so they thought.

But what they expected was not to be. Entering the tomb, they discovered – to their shock and alarm – that He wasn't there. In His place was an angel dressed in white, who said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here . . . But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him, as He said to you."

It seems Jesus is always doing the unexpected. Jairus' daughter died and Jesus did the unexpected, raising her from the dead. The son of a widow in Nain died; Jesus did the unexpected and raised him to life. Lazarus, His dear friend, was dead for several days when Jesus showed up and restored him to life. Those people didn't get a proper burial either, because Jesus did the unexpected.

And now He has done it again, this time by raising Himself from the dead. This was so unexpected! But should it have been?



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Jesus is the Lord of Life. In fact, He *is* life! He came into this fallen world for the sole purpose of restoring life. By His death, Jesus gained life . . . not only for Himself, but for all who believe in Him.

So, what does all this mean? When we leave this holy house tonight, what are we to take with us? At the very least, this: Jesus does the unexpected. When life gets difficult, when your problems seem overwhelming, when death rules the day and you are tempted to despair, Jesus shows up and does the unexpected.

Maybe He won't solve all your problems in one fell swoop, maybe He won't reverse the march of death in your own body or that of a loved one, but He does provide a peace that you can't explain, and that, even if your worst expectation comes true and death overtakes you . . . as His beloved child, and by faith in His suffering, death, and resurrection, you have the assurance of the unexpected, the promise of resurrection and life forever in the unimaginable glory of heaven. Christ has risen! (He has risen indeed, alleluia!) And so, too, shall you! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen