

# The Easter Mindset

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Date: 20 April 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. My name is Tommy. I'm the rector here at Church of the Advent and delighted to welcome you. Delighted to celebrate Easter. I have to say this is probably, I say this about several of our holidays. This is, I think, my favorite holiday. Easter. No one does Easter like Anglicans. I have to say I think that our tradition just honors a tradition and a holiday worth honoring above many of the rest.

It's a wonderful sort of week-long celebration culminating today and then continuing for weeks and weeks after. So I love this holiday. I love all the traditions around it. I love getting to welcome people like you to come and worship. I love celebrating baptisms, which we're going to do a little bit later in the service. All of those things I love.

The passage we're looking at this morning has a warning that we need to pay attention to in our love of this holiday, and that is this, that Easter is not meant to be a mere holiday.

It's a wonderful holiday. It's a wonderful holiday. It's a wonderful holiday to celebrate. But if we allow it to remain merely a holiday, we are missing out on something. We're missing out on something that can completely change the way we live our daily lives, not just today or next week or the next few weeks, but all of life, if it merely remains a holiday.

We're looking at Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4, where we see that Easter is much more than a holiday. It's meant to be a mindset, a mindset that we carry with us.

[ 1 : 35 ] That's why, in the Christian tradition, every Sunday is a mini Easter celebration. We live in a perpetual state of Easter.

By mindset, I mean that Easter is meant to be the lens through which we make sense of our lives and the world around us. Now, we're not talking here about putting on rose-colored glasses.

That's a kind of willful naivety in the name of being optimistic. It's being out of touch with reality. It's denying or minimizing the negative and just trying to focus on the positive.

That's not at all what we're talking about. In many ways, we're talking about the opposite. An Easter mindset is not about having rose-colored glasses. It's about putting on resurrection-colored glasses, which allows us actually to be brutally honest about the brokenness of the world and the brokenness inside ourselves.

It allows us to face head-on, as Rob said last night, a bare-knuckled confrontation with sin and death. And yet, at the same time, we're able to remain completely unshakable, unflappable.

[ 2 : 51 ] We never lose hope, no matter what. That's what an Easter mindset gives us.

Resurrection-colored glasses. So we're going to just ask two questions of the text this morning.

Why do we need this mindset, and how do we get it? Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that it is not just, these are not just ideas or concepts that we're here to consider intellectually, but this is your living word.

And that as we gather in your name this morning, because of your resurrection, you are a living God who can speak through your living word into our hearts. Lord, we're here not just to hear about you, but to encounter you.

And we pray that in the power of your Holy Spirit, that's what would happen. In Jesus' name, amen. So why do we need an Easter mindset? By the way, I've been fasting lately, as maybe part of my Lenten practice, from references to C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

But it's Easter. So I'm going to let her rip, okay? The great writer, C.S. Lewis, was once a committed atheist. And one afternoon, he picked up a book by George MacDonald named *Fantasties*.

[ 4 : 04 ] And it was a fantasy book, and Lewis at the time thought, well, this will be a nice diversion on my train ride. But as he began to read this book, he realized there was much, much more going on than he first suspected.

This wasn't just a light diversion from reality. Even though it was a work of fiction, Lewis realized this is pointing to something deeper. This is pointing to something deeper and mysterious that is actually true.

It's pointing to deeper truths about God and deeper truths about the world. And he later wrote, That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized.

The rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer. What he's saying there is that his conversion began with the conversion of his imagination.

What he refers to as the baptism of his imagination, which eventually led to the conversion of his life. Led to him becoming a Christian.

[ 5 : 06 ] Now, I'll say this, if you're here and you're not a Christian, it's worth reading more about Lewis's conversion. Because it shows us God's ability to speak in all kinds of unexpected ways in our lives.

But the reason I'm telling you this story is because I suspect that many of us here, who would consider ourselves to be Christians, may have had the opposite experience.

In other words, we've been intellectually converted, maybe a long time ago. But somewhere along the way, our imagination got left behind.

In other words, our mindset hasn't changed. We believe these things intellectually, but our mindset, the way we imagine the world to be and to function, hasn't changed.

Our imagination is in some ways still in the tomb. You know, we call ourselves Christians, but on a day-to-day level, our mindset is more a reflection of the culture around us than it is the hope of Easter.

[ 6 : 14 ] That's one of Paul's primary concerns here in his letter to the Colossian Christians in chapter 2, verse 8. He worries that they have been, as he says, taken captive by the empty ideas of the surrounding culture.

He says, you're Christians, you've been raised, and yet he worries they've been taken captive by these empty ideas. Now, we live in the modern West, and one of the most prevailing ideas in our culture is a worldview that I would summarize with the word materialism.

The idea that this world is all there is, this life is all we get, there's nothing beyond what we can see, hear, touch, taste. That has really shaped the modern Western mindset.

What do I mean by that? Well, I think that's the reason why our lives tend to be filled with such a sense of urgency and anxiety and FOMO, right, fear of missing out, because it's up to us to make our lives count before the clock runs out.

We've got to get all we can out of this life. We have to scramble to find security and success and hopefully leave some kind of legacy so people will remember us a hundred years from now before our time is up.

[ 7 : 25 ] I think the materialism in our culture, that sits behind the fact that many of us feel like our worth is merely the sum of our achievements. Because really there's no purpose behind our existence.

We're just cosmic accidents. What other source of worth would there be than what we're able to accomplish? I think this is why it's up to us to define our own identities, which many of us tell ourselves is a good thing, but in reality it causes a lot of stress.

Because we have to base that identity either on how we feel or on our performance, and neither is a good platform. Neither can bear the weight of a soul.

So our identities are often shaky and insecure and require lots of validation. I think this materialism is why we have very little in the way of resources to face suffering.

Because there's no meaning to be found in suffering. If you're suffering, it just means that you've been dealt a bad hand. So life is really about avoiding pain and maximizing pleasure, because nothing really matters.

[ 8 : 42 ] And certainly we have no resources to help us deal with death. So we fear it. We deny it. We try to delay it as long as possible. You know, in our country, our entire healthcare system is oriented around keeping people alive as long as possible.

Often that means spending millions of dollars to prolong a kind of half-life of suffering. You know, you go on Instagram or TikTok and you see all manner of self-appointed longevity experts offering advice for how to delay aging and death.

And you know, this is nothing new. In the Middle Ages, they also had longevity experts. The advice was a little different back then. In order to live longer, they said we should, first of all, definitely avoid both sneezing and sex.

I don't understand. There's something there. Very dangerous. Avoid trimming your fingernails when there are certain constellations in the sky.

Certain astrological signs. Suck on gold nuggets. If you can get your hands on them. I won't continue the list.

[ 9 : 58 ] It gets pretty gruesome here, but you get the idea. And here's the thing. The advice changes from one generation to the next. But one thing remains the same. Every single person dies.

Not a single one of these longevity experts is alive today. But you know, that doesn't stop us from trying to deny death. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

That's our mentality. That's our mindset. That's the way people in our culture tend to think. And it's worth pausing and reflecting on your own mindset. To what extent do you identify with some of what we've just talked about?

In times like the ones that we are living in, with unbelievable political turmoil and job insecurity and a stock market being driven by extreme fear.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by a sense of existential dread. Because if this is all there is, if the materialists are right, then there's really no source of transcendent hope or security.

[ 11 : 05 ] This is all we have. And so if the world falls apart, there's no safety net. Paul is saying to Christians, don't allow yourselves to be taken captive by empty ideas like these.

Don't allow your mindset to be determined by these empty philosophies that are dominant in the culture around you. He's saying just as Jesus was raised out of the tomb to new life, just as your body, if you're a Christian, was raised out of the waters of baptism to new life, so your mindset needs to be raised up.

Your imagination needs to be, in a sense, baptized. So that raises our second question. How do we get this Easter mindset? How do we get this baptism of imagination?

Colossians 3.1 says, this is Paul arguing, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God.

Verse 2, set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Now what does he mean by things above? Seek and set your mind on things above.

[ 12 : 20 ] What's he talking about? Well, I would put forward that he's talking about the great truths at the heart of Easter. The great truths at the heart of Easter. Kids, get your bells ready.

The first great truth at the heart of Easter is this. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen. And listen, let's just be very clear on what we're talking about. This is not some metaphor. I'm not saying that Christ is risen in a metaphorical sense.

As though some people in some churches say, Well, as long as he's risen in your heart, as long as you feel a sense of his presence, as long as his teaching still warms you, then he's risen.

That's not what we are talking about here. You know, Christians in the early church faced unthinkable persecution. Horrible threats of violence and torture and death.

[ 13 : 18 ] And when you see these early Christians singing as they sat in prison, going joyfully to their own executions, praising God up until the moment of their death, you don't get that kind of courage from a metaphor, with all due respect.

You get that kind of courage because you know that death has been defeated. You get that kind of courage because you have certainty, because you've seen with your own eyes. Death is no more. You know, the resurrection was a public, historic event. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that when it happened, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people, many of whom were still alive when these accounts were written down.

You could go find them and ask them whether or not what was being said about Jesus was in fact true. You were there, you knew. In Acts chapter 26, Paul says to King Agrippa about the resurrection of Jesus, he says, you know, O King, you know that these things are true.

They didn't happen in a corner. So what's so clear as we read these accounts is that this was public knowledge. The debate was not about whether or not it happened.

[ 14 : 33 ] The debate in the first century was how to make sense of it. This is one of the things I would say that makes Christianity fairly unique because religions often involve adopting the values

of the religious leader.

You know, the leader says, you should tell the truth. You shouldn't lie. You should not steal. You shouldn't murder. And the followers say, okay, we'll adopt these values and this is how we'll live. We believe in the values of the founder. But Christianity says something different. When Christians talk about belief, we're not primarily talking about the values that Jesus instilled in his followers. Christians talk about belief in terms of believing in historic fact. Our values are downstream from those facts. The values matter, but they're not the primary source of our faith. And there's a big difference between believing in values and believing in facts. That's like the difference between me saying, you know, I believe that slavery is wrong and people should be free. [15:38] And me saying, you know, I believe that on January 31st, 1865, slavery was abolished. You know, one is a value, but the other is a historic fact. So I would ask, which one offers more hope to someone who's in slavery?

Hey, I just want you to know, I really believe you should be free. Or because of this historic fact, you are free. The first truth of Easter is that Christ is risen.

And you know, that leads. Amen. That leads to the second truth of Easter flows out of the first.

Because Christ is risen. Paul says this.

Your death is behind you. Your death is behind you. Paul says in verse 3, you, meaning Christians, you have died. You have already died.

To be a Christian is to be spiritually joined to Christ. His death was your death, he's saying. His resurrection will be your resurrection. In other words, the worst is behind you and the best is yet to come.

[16:49] That's what that means. In a sense, we have been raised with Christ. In another sense, we will experience a resurrection life we can only barely begin to fathom. The death that Jesus died on the cross, that experience of being cut off from God, cut off from the source of life, and plunging into that unfathomable abyss of judgment and abandonment.

That's over and done with. Jesus endured it on our behalf. Therefore, we never have to. Christ has defeated death.

Christ has defeated sin once and for all. So the experience that awaits us at the end of our lives, as we look forward, we use this word death.

Death. It's a good enough word, but the meaning of that word has changed profoundly because of Easter. This experience that awaits us at the end of our earthly life that we call death is simply a doorway into a new kind of life, a new kind of existence.

It's a doorway into eternity. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your victory?

[18:08] You know, he's mocking death. Oh, death, where is your sting? It's no more. You know, the empty materialism of our culture offers absolutely no way to cope with death.

Death is final. Death is the end. It's something to be feared, denied, delayed. But Easter shows us that death is merely a door.

It's merely the beginning. It shows us that this life that we cling to so much now, this is just the prologue. And the real adventure begins on the other side of that door.

So the first truth, Christ is risen. These are the things above. The things above. Christ is risen.

Because Christ is risen, you have already died.

The worst is behind you and the best is yet to come. Here's the third truth that flows out of Easter. When Christ appears, which he will. When Christ appears, your true self will be revealed.

[19:19] Your true identity will be unveiled. Verses three and four. Your life, Paul says, is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. You also will appear with him in glory.

Now, it's like, well, if I'm here, how can I appear? The truth about you will be unveiled for all to see. The truth about you, the truth about who you are right now, rests securely in the heart and the mind of God.

The truth about who you are, rests securely in the heart and the mind of God. And Paul says that one day when Jesus comes again, that truth is going to be revealed.

And here's the truth, friends. You were made for glory. You were made for glory. Last night at the Easter vigil, we heard the story of creation.

[ 20 : 24 ] And that original man and woman. And God's creation of them as the pinnacle. As the crowning jewel of all that he had made. That's who you really are.

You were made for glory. You were made for eternity. I told you I'm going to let her rip. Here's what C.S. Lewis writes.

You have never talked to a mere mortal. It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.

The dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. You were made for glory.

That truth is hidden for the time being. It's easy for us to forget that. It's easy for us to lose sight of it in the people around us, the people sitting next to us, the difficult people in our families, the people with whom we struggle, the frustrating boss.

[ 21 : 37 ] That truth is hidden for the time being. But one day it's going to be revealed. 1 John 3 says, although we don't fully know what we're going to be like when that day comes, we do know that when Christ appears, John says, we shall be like him.

We don't have to manufacture our own boutique, bespoke, self-made identity. You can.

But it can't hold a candle to the truth. We lack the imagination to come up with the kind of identity that would come in any way close to the truth.

We don't have to prove our worth or measure it by the sum of our achievements or find it in the affirmation of the people around us. We don't have to look inside ourselves to try and figure out and discern who we are, what we are.

The truth is who you are, your true self, rests securely in the heart and the mind of God. We have only to live out the truth of who we are. To live as people who belong to God in Christ as his beloved children.

[ 22 : 56 ] People for whom Christ gave his life. So these are, I would suggest, the things that Paul has in mind when he uses the phrase, the things that are above.

The great truths of Easter. Christ is risen, your death is behind you, and when Christ appears, your true self will be revealed. The final question with a couple of minutes left is this.

What do we do with these truths? What do we do with these truths? Well, this can either be something we talk about once a year at a holiday and go eat some candy and good food and then go on with our lives.

Or we can do what the Apostle Paul says. He says, seek the things that are above. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

And those words are powerful words. Seek. Zateo. That's a heart word. He's saying, set your heart on these things. The next word, proneo, means to develop an entire attitude based on something.

[ 23 : 59 ] Set your mind on these things. In other words, Paul is saying, devote your heart and your mind to these things. And in the first century world and first century Koine Greek, heart and mind are much more interchangeable than they are in our kind of dualistic way of thinking.

Heart and mind, it's saying, allow these things to recalibrate your entire way of desiring and meaning making and envisioning and perceiving and imagining and orienting.

You need to be entirely recalibrated by the things that are above. So let me put it another way. We need to develop bifocal vision.

And I don't mean bifocals. I mean two lenses through which we view the world and our lives simultaneously. Two ways of seeing the world at the same time overlapping and enriching one another.

Through the lens of your eye, your physical eye, you have a view of the world that is the unmitigated, undiluted, full on, bare knuckle confrontation with the truth of the world.

[ 25 : 09 ] You see it and take it as it is. But you also see the world through the lens of a baptized imagination. The truer, deeper reality of the great story of Christ and his victory over sin and death.

And you see both realities overlapping at the same time. This is how Tolkien describes the elves in Lord of the Rings.

He says this, The elves may fear the dark lord and they may fly before him, but never again will they listen to him or serve him. They do not fear the ring rays.

For those who have dwelt in the blessed realm live at once in both worlds. And against both the seen and the unseen, they have great power.

The elves have bifocal vision. They're acutely aware of the anguish and the evil in their midst, but they do not live in fear. They have great power because they're able to see the harsh realities of middle earth in the light of the more enduring reality of the blessed realm.

[ 26 : 28 ] And this is how the Apostle Paul is talking about Christians in Colossians chapter 3. When it comes to the fear and the uncertainty, especially the things that we're facing right now in our society.

The way we see our work or our family or our marriages. The way we see our enemies. The way we think about suffering and death. We have the ability to see things as they are.

To face hardship. To endure catastrophe. But it doesn't overwhelm us. It doesn't fill us with despair. Because we dwell in the blessed realm. Right?

We have been raised with Christ to new life and we dwell with him in the blessed realm of eternity. Even as we sit here this morning. We exist in those two worlds simultaneously.

Our lives are caught up in Christ. So we have this eternal, unshakable security. The worst is behind us. The best is yet to come. So friends, if this becomes our mentality.

[ 27 : 31 ] And not just a yearly holiday. We are able to endure things that frankly would knock other people flat. Don't build your life on the empty promises of the world.

Build your life on the empty tomb of Easter. Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh, Heavenly Father.

We know that words cannot change hearts. That requires your Holy Spirit. We pray that you would wield your word. And that through the power of your Holy Spirit.

As we pray and sing. As we gather. To celebrate this baptism. As we gather around your table. To receive your body and blood. Lord, we pray that in all these ways.

You would turn our hearts of stone to flesh. That through your written word. We would come to see your living word. Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen.