

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, one of the most well-known openings to any novel is as follows: *"My mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I received a telegram from the old people's home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Very sincerely yours.' That doesn't mean anything. It might have been yesterday."* If it sounds familiar, it's from the classic French novel popular in high school literature classes called *The Stranger*, by Albert Camus. The opening sentences are deliberately provocative and set the tone for the rest of the story, which is of a man named Meursault, a detached, ironic man who doesn't see the point of love, work, or friendship, who seemingly randomly shoots a man without knowing why, and ends up being executed but not really caring for his fate one way or the other.

The mood of the novel is mesmerizing in the coolly distant voice in which Meursault speaks. Everything about his actions is sane and untethered. It's deliberately so, as Camus is an author and philosopher narrating what his perception of life is — something he calls "the absurd": an existence that is random, hopeless, without preordained meaning. Our lives spinning senselessly on a tiny rock in the corner of an indifferent universe, living with the knowledge that our efforts are largely futile, our lives soon forgotten, and human beings corrupt and violent. Camus describes the wandering through a life that simply makes no sense and simply cannot make sense.

While these ideas may sound unheard of or very foreign to you, they probably did not early that first Easter morning. **"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb."** Those women were in an absurd and senseless scenario. Jesus, their friend and teacher, the authoritatively self-identified Messiah who had changed things and directed them, has died. But that's too tame, isn't it? He's been killed. But that's

too tame — he had been tortured publicly and executed like a hardened criminal. A gentle man they had never witnessed do anything wrong had been dragged to court, had been beaten senselessly, had been made a public spectacle with his clothes taken, and had been nailed to a cross where he bled and died.

They didn't have a chance to prepare the body, so they go to the tomb early to finish up the job. But there, it just gets more strange: **"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."** They find the stone in a place it should not be; they do not find the body that should be there. And all of a sudden, there are two angels who startle them and say: **"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"** I mean, where else would a dead body be?

And they run as fast as they can to the disciples and tell them about all the things they saw and heard. The disciples, though, see this as absurd as well. **"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."** They don't give up. The text indicates they kept telling them, repeatedly, over and over what happened. But the disciples say, "That's nonsense." Even Peter, the man of action, usually quick to demonstrate his bold faith, runs off to the tomb, and there: **"Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."**

We usually find ourselves so far removed, proclaiming across time and space: "You silly disciples! How could you not have known? You heard Jesus more than anyone in the world! Oh, silly women! Why are you so surprised? The angels said it. You know what Jesus said!" However, I think we, on the day of cheery songs and bright yellows and white lilies, forget. We forget the power that is death that loomed over that morning. We forget the power that death has. Death is indifferent and undismayed. Death is something that grabs and will not let go. It wraps the body up and holds it. It locks it away in the cage of a casket. It seals it in an urn. It buries and covers under the earth in dirt.

You yourself have never seen it mastered, have you? You have seen it fought, even valiantly. You have seen it held at bay, but it always overtakes. The grays grow. The knees creak. The mind becomes murky. Sometimes you see it and cannot

stop it. Other times it strikes at random with silence as its explanation. It comes for everyone, as it is the result of sin. As Paul says: **"The sting of death is sin."** It's no wonder those disciples, when told that Jesus had risen from death, **"It sounded like nonsense to them."** It's no wonder Peter looked at the cloths and wondered what this could be. It's no wonder those who came to the tomb thought it was more likely that someone had stolen his body than that he had risen. Death is absurd. Death is the entire reason behind Albert Camus's philosophy of life. It's all absurd in the face of death. It's all meaningless in the face of death. It's all nonsense in the face of death.

And I tell you what, if there was not an Easter, it would have been. Without an Easter, Peter would have always wondered, and nothing more. Without an Easter, the disciples would have gone back to their fishing boats, regretting the time they wasted with some guy. Without Easter, it's all nonsense. So what if Jesus died? Everybody does. So what if his death was gruesome? Lots of people do. So what if he was punished unjustly? Happens all the time. Jesus's words about prayer — nonsense. His promises of care — nonsense. His words from the cross — nonsense. Without Easter, we would never be sure that our sins are covered or that Satan is crushed. St. Paul wrote very honestly: **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."**

But that didn't happen, did it? Quickly enough, those disciples, and those women, and many others saw Jesus. They saw with their own eyes what seemed to be nonsense but what the angels declared: **"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.**

They soon discovered that the nonsense was real. The ultimate enemy, death, had been defeated. The tomb was empty as he promised. Jesus was alive just like he had told them. His resurrection means his death is no longer another on the list of unfortunate and untimely ends; it is the forgiveness of sins sealed in stone. His resurrection means his words in life are no longer meaningless sayings from a man; they are the promises of God himself. His resurrection means the promise of life after death is no longer wishful thinking but the reality enjoyed for believers in

death past, the reality for believers in death future. Sin has been smashed, Death has been destroyed, eternity has been earned.

But there's something interesting that happens at the tomb: you've got some new nonsense to do. You've got the new nonsense of the resurrection. You as a Christian, wrapped in the reality of the resurrection, living and speaking things that are nonsense to the world. All of it always pointing to Easter. All of it sealed by Easter. All of it proclaiming Easter.

When a relative says, "I'm not sure who you think is listening to that prayer; you should probably find some real help" — nonsense. The tomb is empty.

When your coworker says, "You know what, I don't think a lot of people think the same; I think you should probably keep that Bible stuff to yourself" — nonsense. The tomb is empty.

When Satan says, "This time I think God's over it; I think you've done it too many times" — nonsense. The tomb is empty.

When at the graveyard someone says, "I'm sorry for your loss; just be thankful for the time you had together" — nonsense. The tomb is empty.

When the doctor says, "It's terminal; you should probably say your final goodbyes" — nonsense. The tomb is empty.

Easter means I live a life the world calls one of nonsense. Where my sins cannot change how my Lord sees me, where I sacrifice self for others who don't even like me, where I witness to people who do not want to hear it. A life of nonsense where death is not the worst thing that can happen to me.

Brothers and sisters, rejoice in that absurdity of the resurrection. Live in the nonsense of Easter. If there is no Easter, Jesus means nothing. If there is no Easter, his forgiveness is meaningless. If there is no Easter, we have nothing to tell. But the tomb is empty; the body is gone; Jesus is alive. His Word is truth; his promises are permanent; our mission is obvious. **Christ is arisen! He is risen indeed!** Amen.