

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord
April 5, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Hold onto something solid

—1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Jesus could have said, “I told you so!”

Many times Jesus had told his disciples exactly what was going to happen on this weekend. “We are going to Jerusalem,” he had said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. They will beat him and put him to death, and on the third day he will rise again.” The angels who greeted the women at the empty tomb said, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.” But in spite of all these promises, everyone still had trouble wrapping their head around Jesus’ resurrection. Why? Jesus could have said, “I told you so,” but the disciples were slow to believe—to the point where Jesus has to admonish his disciples for their lack of faith. There’s a reason for it: People don’t come back from the dead. Dead people stay dead. But this is Jesus, the Lord of life. They should have known.

The reaction of the disciples was a perfectly natural response to confronting a completely earth-shattering and mind-blowing reality. Bewilderment. Fear. Shock. Confusion. Doubt. Skepticism. Finally, amazement, faith, and praise to God. Jesus’ followers didn’t all meet at the tomb, talk to the angels, and go away saying, “Yay! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Let’s go tell the world!” That would be the stuff of myths and legends and bedtime stories—but this isn’t a fantastic fable. This is historical fact. Without it there is no Christianity. Without the resurrection there is no Good News. Without Jesus’ resurrection there is no salvation. Everything depends on the resurrection! And since everything you and I and every disciple depends on what happened on the third day after Jesus was crucified, God makes absolutely certain that there are many reliable witnesses to the living Christ. God gives us something solid to hold onto.

Brothers, I am going to call your attention to the gospel that I preached to you. You received it, and you took your stand on it. You are also being saved by that gospel that was expressed in the words I preached to you, if you keep your hold on it—unless you believed in vain. Hold onto the gospel. Hold onto the words of Holy Scripture. Hold onto the testimony of eyewitnesses. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all, he appeared also to me, the stillborn child, so to speak.

Scripture records the testimony of eyewitnesses, men and women who had seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead. They didn’t make up stories. They didn’t get rich talking about Jesus. Quite to the contrary. Do you know what happened to just about every one of these disciples? They testified to what they had seen, and they suffered for their testimony. They were told: Give up this resurrection business, throw away this idea that Jesus is the Son of God, or we will torture you, and you will suffer terribly and die. And what did they do? They suffered and died, but they did not give up their testimony because they knew Jesus was alive, they had seen him alive, and they spoke what they knew to be true. Christian friends, hold onto something solid. Hold onto the words of Scripture. Jesus Christ suffered, died, and is risen from the dead!

Here’s what you don’t hold onto: Don’t hold onto wrong ideas. There are a lot of them out there, ideas that people have concocted because they sound good and scratch where people itch. Don’t hold onto the idea that everyone who dies goes to a better place. That’s a popular notion nowadays, but it’s completely false. Most people who die don’t go to a better place. People who trust in Jesus Christ, who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that Jesus rose from the dead—they go to a better place. Jesus is the only way to a better place. He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me” (John 14:6). Don’t hold onto the idea that Jesus came to bring peace and prosperity on earth. That’s another popular notion, but again, it’s completely false. Jesus didn’t promise an easy life of health, wealth, and earthly prosperity. If he blesses you with those things, wonderful! Praise him for it! But remember that Jesus promises his disciples a cross—and the strength to bear up under the cross of discipleship. Then after the cross of this life comes the crown of heaven. Don’t hold onto wrong ideas.

Hold onto something solid. Hold onto forgiveness. Listen again to the gospel Paul preaches: *Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* Nobody understood better than the Apostle Paul that forgiveness is what Jesus is all about. Remember where Paul had come from. He had persecuted the church. He had been responsible for Christians being killed. He had tried to stamp out the Way of Jesus Christ. That was until Jesus himself turned him around from being Saul the persecutor to Paul the Christian apostle and missionary. The fact that Jesus had done this for him left Paul completely blown away

by God's grace and kindness. He says, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15). The fact that Jesus had taken him when he was riding the path straight to hell and turned him into someone who loved and followed Jesus—more than that—into an apostle, someone sent out in the name of the Lord Jesus, never ceased to amaze Paul completely. The fact that Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, appeared to *him*, forgave *his* sins, completely left him astounded. *For I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. But by the grace of God I am what I am . . .*" Nobody held onto forgiveness more than the Apostle Paul himself. Brothers and sisters, you hold onto something solid. Hold onto the forgiveness of your sins that Jesus purchased with his own blood and that he sealed with his resurrection. "He was delivered over to death for our sins, and he was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Here's what you don't hold onto: Don't hold onto your sins. Don't make excuses for them. Making excuses for our sins is holding on to them, not letting them go. Don't hold onto your sinful passions, to bitterness, to unwholesome talk and crude language, to greed, to idolatry. Don't hold onto your sins and think that you're going to just keep on doing what you do—same attitudes, same behaviors—and God is just going to turn a blind eye and pretend it's all okay. God is not mocked! Don't hold onto gratifying your sinful nature. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5, "Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, just as you are unleavened. For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, namely, Christ! So let us keep celebrating the festival, not with old yeast, not with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The yeast of sin spreads! It infects your life and it spreads to others. Don't hold onto sin. Repent of sin. Turn away from anything that has captivated you, entangled you, and is preventing you from receiving forgiveness. When we hold onto sin, we cannot hold onto forgiveness. First we let go of sin in repentance, then hold onto something solid: grasp forgiveness in faith.

But now, here's another thing that you don't hold onto: When you have a penitent heart that grieves over your sin and trusts in Jesus, don't hold onto your guilt. When you repent of your sin, you let your guilt go. This is the dastardly nature of sinful behavior: it seems so fun, so enticing, so alluring, so seductive in the moment. Then when it draws you in, Satan springs the trap and accuses you, overwhelms you with guilt, tries to drive you to despair. Don't play his game! Hold onto something solid. Your sins were nailed to the cross of Jesus and buried in the tomb forever. Hold onto freedom from every burden, hold onto forgiveness in Jesus' resurrection victory, hold it tightly, and never let it go!

Hold onto something solid. Hold onto your baptism! Whether it was this morning or 90+ years ago, hold onto your baptism because in your baptism God made a covenant with you. He washed you in Jesus' blood, gave you the forgiveness of sins, placed his Name upon you, caused you to be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, and adopted you into his family. Hold onto your baptism as God's gift to you in Jesus.

Hold onto something solid. Hold onto Jesus. Don't hold onto yourself. Don't hold onto the idea that because you've lived such a good life, because you've been such a great person God's going to give you a big pat on the back and say, "Come on into heaven!" Don't hold onto your own good works. Don't trust in yourself for salvation. Hold onto Jesus. He is the only perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the altar of the cross. He is the only perfect High Priest, who offered his own perfect blood before the Father's throne as payment for your sins. He is the only one whose perfect obedience counts before the Father. He is the only one who takes away our sins by washing us in his blood. He is the only one who gives us his perfection, credits it to us, so that we stand before God clothed in Jesus. Hold onto something solid: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul" (Hebrews 6:19).

Hold onto something solid. Hold onto the truth. Jesus said, "If you continue in my Word, you are really my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32). This is the truth: Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Amen.