

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2025
SERMON: IT'S NOT NONSENSE!
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:1-12
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LUKE 24:1-12

24 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. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. **5** In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: **7** 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " **8** Then they remembered his words.

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.

Sermon: It's Not Nonsense!

I've told you before that I really love the program "Alcoholics Anonymous", colloquially known as "AA". I am not *in* the program, but I know a lot of people who are and the Easter testimonies of those people are often the most incredible things I've ever heard.

My favorite professor in seminary – his name was Dr. Tom Porter – often said that our churches should be doing in our sanctuaries on Sunday morning what our AA friends are doing in the basement on Tuesday night. For any church that has, indeed, hosted an AA group in their building, or anyone who's walked by what looked like an AA meeting in a park, you may be thinking: "Uh, no thanks? All of the cigarette smoking and obvious drug deals in the parking lot between people who are only there because of court mandates are *not* what we want to emulate on Sunday morning." And I hear you.

I hear you because it's hard to change: old habits die hard, and we don't need people hanging around bringing their unsavory habits into our sacred space. For anyone who's known an addict, which I'm wager to say is probably most of us, watching someone suffer from addiction is one of the most frustrating and terrible things because it feels

like there's just *nothing* that can be done about it. Addiction doesn't just cause agony for the addicted person, but ripple effects into everything and everyone they touch through manipulation, theft, death, general chaos, and worse.

So when someone says they've gotten sober, maybe for the 3rd, 10th or 30th time after relapsing, we may feel like the disciples who have been told some "nonsense" about Jesus being raised from the dead. "There's no way," we may think. "They'll just be back on the sauce again next month, you'll see."

This reaction is a protective measure against our own hearts. We *want* our loved ones to overcome their seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We grieve the loss of our friends and family who have spiritually died in their addictions. Although Jesus certainly wasn't an addict, the disciples were in a grieving moment over a loss that might've felt just as painful as a mother who has watched her son battle alcoholism for years and years. Best to just accept He is dead. We saw it happen. No need for "nonsense" about new life, that will just result in reopening the wound that we're trying to heal.

Yet, the disciples arrived at the tomb to realize it was true: that something new and unusual had definitely taken place, and at any rate, Jesus was not there any longer.

What they found instead was the most revolutionary idea ever to enter the human experience: that God was not just some distant deity watching from above, who may or may not accept our repentance for whatever shortcomings we have because we burned some lamb's fat for Him. Instead, Jesus was a God who *came down*, who *became one of us*, who *suffered* the worst of what we suffer. Jesus experienced betrayal, physical agony, the weight of death, and even—though we often don't talk about it—something like the despair of addiction: the gnawing pain of needing rescue and the total surrender to God's will when all else falls away. He didn't save Himself. He gave Himself over. And then—He came back. He showed us the way *through* death.

This idea—that God would not only *suffer*, but *rise*, and *bring us with Him*—that was totally new. There is no other religious system, no other spirituality, that claims God suffers and dies *with us* and *for us*, and then *invites us to rise too*. Not because we cleaned ourselves up first. Not because we repented perfectly with a lamb offering. Not because we had enough willpower. But because He did it for us. And all He asks is that we trust Him to do it again.

That Easter idea? That's the foundation of AA.

In the 1930s, AA was started by a group of Christian men who really believed this: that when they were at their lowest—drunk, broke, hopeless, and spiritually dead—Jesus could bring them back to life. But only if they gave Him control. The whole program was built around that Easter truth: If you turn your will and your life over to God, He will bring you out of the grave.

And thousands—millions—have been saved by that truth since. AA has grown and adapted to include people from all walks of life, including many who have felt *wounded* by the Church—especially by Christians who treated them as morally defective rather than spiritually desperate. That’s the part we have to own. For far too long, the Church didn’t offer resurrection to people suffering from addiction—it offered shame. It institutionalized people. It cast them out.

But AA flipped that script. It said: *You don’t have to fix yourself before you come to God. Just come. Just admit your powerlessness. Just believe He can do it. And He will.* That is the most Easter message I can think of.

People who *really* follow the AA program—not just those who are court-ordered and hanging around for the coffee and the cigarettes—live out resurrection in real time. They show us what it means to believe in the impossible. They are Easter people in the fullest sense.

I’ve met parents who lost their young children turn to the bottle and destroy their lives, only to become church leaders and advocates for child welfare because Jesus invited them into new life. I once had the honor of witnessing the court sentencing of a meth-dealer-turned-IHS-case-manager who had turned his life over to Christ, and the Judge cried as she provided him the mandatory minimum of 10 years because she could see that new life in Him. He stood boldly, hand in hand with his wife, children, pastors, and a crowded room of Christians witnessing his testimony as the Judge delivered her sentence, and everyone wept — not because it was *nonsense*, not because he was hopeless and could not change, but because in the cloud of witness in that courtroom, it was clear that he had changed indeed. When we see the Easter moment happen in addicts, we know it.

And that’s why Dr. Porter was right—we should be doing in the sanctuary on Sunday what our AA friends are doing in the basement on Tuesday night. And no, I don’t mean we should be smoking in the parking lot. I mean we should be *telling the truth about our darkness, lifting each other up into grace, and trusting God to make us new, over and over and over again.* When we see the Easter moment in each other, here in this sanctuary, *do we know it?*

We should – because Jesus *is* alive. And dead people *do* change.

Let’s not be like the disciples who called it nonsense. Let’s be like the women who *believed*. Let’s believe in the empty tomb. Let’s believe that addiction doesn’t have the final word. That depression, grief, shame, brokenness—none of those get to be the end. Because God is that good.

And today, we have nine people in our church who are saying yes to that truth in a new way. They are committing to walk together and with us, intentionally, through the twists and turns of life—not because they're perfect, but because they believe in the power of grace. They believe that lifting each other up, in community, in vulnerability, in spiritual courage, is how we keep finding resurrection again and again.

That is the most powerful thing in the world. Not because of what we can do. But because of what God will do when we let Him have our hearts—even the messy, dead, buried parts.

Jesus is not in the tomb. He is risen. And He's calling us out of our graves, too. So let's stop calling it nonsense, and start calling it what it really is:

Resurrection.

Amen.