Good morning! Welcome to church and to Easter Sunday! This is the most joyous day of the Christian year and I’m glad you’re here for the celebration!

We do well to celebrate Easter. It represents a new Reality – an old Reality, actually – but made so vibrant that there is no missing it. It is the Reality of God’s love.

How do you know when someone loves you? Generally it’s a feeling. You feel loved. And the one who loves you does nice things for you; gives you things you like. I have a friend whose husband years ago celebrated her birthday by giving her a set of garden tools. She was amazed! Overjoyed! Not only was it a perfect gift, it showed how deeply this man understood his wife. And affirmed her.

If we can love that well, just think of how much better God loves. Want to know what that love looks like? Look at Jesus. According to the wisdom of his day he did everything wrong. Conventional wisdom said avoid the lower class. It’s filled with harlots, corrupt tax agents and other outcasts. But Jesus ate with them; insisted that they join him for dinner. Avoid the chronically ill: they are leprous, demon-possessed and unclean. But Jesus touched them, and in his loving touch they were healed. Avoid, at all costs, running afoul of those in power. But Jesus challenged them by their own hateful rules. “By all means stone to death the woman caught in adultery. But let him who is innocent of that offense throw the first stone.”

This is wild love. This is love that risks itself for us. It is love that in some sense makes no sense at all! But it is utter Reality.

The problem with this Reality is that we don’t see it. Too much stuff stands between it and us. The problems we face living in today’s world are unprecedented: political intrigue, saber-rattling with nuclear weapons, environmental threats and economic injustice. The difficulties those problems create in us may also be unprecedented. Fear chronically bordering on panic; exhausting stress. Loneliness.

No wonder we have a hard time seeing that God is deeply in love with us. It isn’t our fault. God knows it isn’t our fault. So the Divine Life gave. That’s what life does: it gives; it generates. Divine Life gave us Jesus who, remaining utterly faithful to the virtues of love, forgiveness, acceptance and peace, allowed himself to be sacrificed for those virtues. He died because he would not betray God’s love. He would not rescind all that he had lived for. Good Friday is love crucified. And on Easter, it is reborn. Because love cannot be destroyed. Jesus lives again.

How Jesus lives again is somewhat a matter of controversy. The resurrection of Christ is being debated by those who believe in a physical, bodily resurrection and those who say it doesn’t matter whether the tomb is empty or not because Christ was experienced as a living presence by his followers after Easter, and is experienced as a living presence now.

I have spent my life believing in an empty tomb. But now I’m fine either way. Because it is the Reality of God’s persistent love that matters. It is the love that keeps showing up whenever Christ is present. Bodily resurrection? Spiritual resurrection? We cannot be so flip with our faith to say it doesn’t matter what you believe. But if thinking about resurrection gets you all tied up in metaphysical knots, allow me to tell you about the Tooth Fairy.

When I was a little girl, my mom and dad told me that the Tooth Fairy would come every time I lost a baby tooth. If I put it under my pillow before falling asleep, the Tooth Fairy would take it and leave money in its place! Money! And sure enough, for every tooth I lost, there was a quarter waiting for me under my pillow the next day. This was when a quarter was BIG money.

At some point, I decided there probably was no Tooth Fairy. There were, however, all those quarters to account for. How that money got under my pillow I can’t really say. But there is no denying that it got there. That’s reality.

Easter has less to do with what’s in or not in the grave and *everything to do with the Reality of God’s love.* Because God’s love lives. Jesus lives. *That* is the Easter miracle: nothing we can do can extinguish God’s love, not even crucifixion.

We have a hard time seeing that God is deeply in love with us. But that’s Reality. It is the quarter under the pillow. It is tangible; concrete; and on Easter: made vibrantly obvious. The reality of new life on Easter morning is the reality that Christ lives and that we can experience him in love.