1. **Joke:** “Humorist Isaac Asimov tells the story of a fire-and-brimstone preacher looking down sternly at the worshippers in the pews and saying, "It is a scary thought that every member of this congregation is going to die." He had evoked a somber-looking expression from everyone -- with one exception. A man in the front pew had a disbelieving smile on his face. The preacher's face grew red as he looked squarely at the man in the front pew and said, "I repeat! Every member of this congregation is going to die!" Again a disbelieving smile came over the man's face. Now the preacher addressed the man directly. "May I ask you what you find so amusing in my statement that everyone in this congregation is going to die? To which the man replied, "I am not amused. I am relieved. You see, I am not a member of this congregation."

2. It is a fact of life that every person will die someday. What most of us do not know is when or how. This life will come to a close. All that you have accumulated and worked for will be useless to you once your body goes into the grave or the cremation oven.
   a. Some people would reply, “This life is all there is. Once you die that is all there is, you cease to exist just like an insect or an animal. When you are dead, you are dead.”
   b. Have you ever heard someone say something like that? It sounds pretty hopeless doesn’t it.
      i. There are millions of people who hold to this nihilistic outlook on life. They live each day with only a regard toward what they can get out of this life.
      ii. Some have a humanistic view that says to have a fulfilling life you have to have a giving life. But in the end, it is still the end. For those who believe that this life is all there is, and that there is nothing to look forward to, death is dead end street without an exit ramp.

3. So on a day in which we celebrate the most amazing demonstration of life after death ever to be given; I wonder… why are you here?
   a. Did you come here today because your family invited you? Or maybe strong armed you into being here?
   b. Did you come because you know its Easter and it’s a family tradition to join together in church on Easter?
   c. Maybe you are here because you were looking for something, maybe a little hope, maybe a little meaning in your life that hasn’t felt very meaningful or hopeful?
   d. No matter what your reasons for being here might be, I believe that you are here, today, because the God who created you, the God who designed you, the God who loves you, wanted you here today.

4. Easter Sunday, known also as Resurrection Sunday, is the most amazing celebration in the Christian calendar. While we celebrate the fact that Jesus rose again after suffering a horribly painful and gruesome death – it is much more than that. In fact, EVERYTHING CHANGED because of what happened that weekend 2000 years ago. History changed. People changed. Nothing has been the same since. And despite religious people trying to use Jesus for their own benefit, He still changes lives!
   a. In case you hadn’t heard, Jesus, born in a miraculous way 33 years earlier, had been going around Israel and Jerusalem its capital for 3 years doing some amazing miracles and teaching people about the nature and character of God.
      i. He spoke about the power of love and self giving, and accepted people from all sorts of rejected backgrounds and lifestyles.
      ii. He had his hardest words for the religious folks, the ones who thought that they were better than others because of the things they believed and the rituals they practiced.
      iii. He got in the faces of those who thought rules were more important than people, and he forgave people who were desperate for a second, third or a fiftieth chance.
iv. After putting up with his countercultural actions for 3 years, the religious establishment arrested him on trumped up charges and tried him for blasphemy.

1. Blasphemy is taking God’s name and using it wrongly. The truth is, Jesus repeatedly said that he was God’s Son, and that He and the Father were One. He openly admitted he was God come to earth to save mankind and to bring human beings into a radical and dynamic relationship with the very Person of God Himself.

2. That didn’t go over well with those folks who had put God into a box
   a. (Literally – the Ark of the Covenant, inside the innermost, inaccessible room of the Temple).
   b. So they got the Roman’s to torture him (39 lashes with a lead tipped whip) and then crucify him on a cross beam where he would suffocate over a period of 6 hours or longer until he eventually would die a horribly prolonged and painful death.
   c. When he died quicker than they expected, they put a spear through his side up through his heart just to make sure.

v. Then some courageous people came and had him buried in one of their own tombs, which the Roman governor had sealed and guarded by soldiers in case his disciples tried to steal his body. And there he lay Friday night, all day Saturday, and into Sunday morning.

vi. But something remarkable happened that Sunday morning. As dawn broke, two of the women (yes, they were more courageous than the men) went to the tomb to clean the body since it had been buried in a hurry because of the Sabbath rules.

1. But when they got to the tomb, the stone that had closed the tomb had been rolled away, the tomb was empty, the guards were gone, and only a burial cloth remained. The women were frightened and thought someone had taken the body…until Jesus appeared to one of them.

5. That first Easter morning everything in heaven and on earth changed.
   a. Matthew records some of this in his gospel “The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.” Matthew 27:52-53
   b. People all around Jerusalem were seeing dead people walking around alive. And it wasn’t a scene from the movie The Sixth Sense, or from The Walking Dead. These were a number of people who had been dead and in their graves who were raised with Christ (as a precursor to the ultimate Resurrection that will occur in the end of days).

i. There happened to be a feast that occurs on that Sunday, celebrated by the religious group “The Sadducees” called the Feast of the First Fruits. It was to occur on the first Sunday after the regular weekly Sabbath following Passover. It is on this day that they go into the fields and gather a small sampling of green barley to present at the temple as an offering of the coming harvest which would occur 49 days later (see 50 days/harvest/Pentecost).

1. These Sadducees, a group who denied the bodily resurrection foretold by the scriptures, would have been in the city early that morning and most likely would have seen these risen saints much to their own disbelief. “Yikes Mary, look its Uncle George…didn’t we bury him last year? What is he doing walking around?”

ii. The Apostle Paul also links these two events: First Fruits and the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of
those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”

6. But Jesus appears to other people as well.
   a. There are 12 separate incidents of him bodily appearing to people recorded in the New Testament. It almost seems as if God is telling us to stop doubting because the proof is overwhelming!
   b. The most exciting is the one written by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 “The Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures—and is still alive!—and he was seen by Cephas, and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Next he was seen by James, then by all the apostles, 8 and finally he was seen by me, as though I were born abnormally late.”
   c. Paul tells about over 500 people SEEING Jesus at the same time, alive!
      i. And he suggests that if you have any doubts, you can ask them...because many of them are still alive to testify to it!
      ii. If they did testify for just 6 minutes each, that would account for 50 hours of testimony.
   d. And then, if you are still a skeptic, you only need to witness the change in the lives of the 11 apostles, who once were cowardly and now were willing to suffer and die for their message, because they had seen Christ alive!
   a. Take a hostile witness, like Josephus, a Jewish historian at the time of Christ: “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”
   b. Then there is James, the brother of Jesus: We have good evidence in the gospels none of the brothers of Jesus believed he was the Messiah, until that day James saw Jesus resurrected.
      i. James and his family tried to take Jesus away from his ministry because they doubted his sanity!
      ii. But then James emerges as one of pillars of the NT church and one of its leaders.
      iii. What would it take to make you believe your brother was the Lord if you didn't see him alive from the dead? He willingly went to his death in AD 67 by the Jewish Sanhedrin for his belief Jesus was Lord, Son of God, resurrected Messiah!

7. The event of the Resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.
   a. No other religion in the world serves or worships a risen savior or prophet. Their tombs are known, their bodies lie decayed within them.
   b. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then we have no hope, no future, no faith, nothing after this life to look forward to.
   c. But if He lives...then EVERYTHING IS CHANGED.
   d. We have a Savior who not only conquered death, but took the penalty for our sins and failings on our behalf. He rose to prove that the grave is not the end, and that there is a hope and a future for those who place their faith in Him.
8. A while ago, I asked you why you were here. This is why.
   a. Because that power to change is here for you today. You don’t have to continue to live a life without meaning or purpose.
   b. Jesus can give you real meaning, real purpose. You can personally experience what it is to be loved unconditionally, irresistibly, just as you are.
   c. I will say this…God will take you as you are but He won’t leave you that way. He wants to make you whole, complete, no longer needing things to make you valuable, but finding your value and identity in His love for you.
      i. He is the Father you have always longed for.
      ii. He is the lover you have sought for ever.
      iii. He is the Hope that makes your tomorrows meaningful.
      iv. His is the Healer who takes your sorrows and sicknesses away.
      v. He is the Savior, who removes your sin and failure and shows you that you are loved for who you are not what you can do or can’t do.
      vi. He is Jesus. Won’t you let Him in today? Let HIM Change your Everything!
   d. Would you like to let Jesus change YOUR life today? It is a simple act of faith, of placing your trust in who He is and what He did for you. You don’t need to know all the answers, just be willing to ask Him the questions you carry. Admit you cannot do this life on your own. Admit you don’t have all the answers. Acknowledge you ARENT God and that He is. And surrender your life, your will and your ways to Him. Like This:
      i. Dear God, I cannot, I will not continue to live my life on my own ability, wits and strength. I am done with it. I have sinned by rejecting you as My One True God, as the One who loves me and deserves my worship. I need a Savior. I need Jesus. Come in Jesus, forgive me of all my sins, failings and choices. I want you. I trust you. I give myself to you.
      ii. In Jesus name Amen.
"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." - Ac 17:30-31

9. A man named George was accustomed to driving his wife, Rosie, to church every Sunday. And every Sunday, they parked in the same spot. George and Rosie had been married for forty years and they loved each other very deeply. They did everything together. They were inseparable in almost every area of their life, except one. When George drove his wife to church Rosie went in and George remained in the car. Where he would read the Sunday paper. Rosie died, and for many Sundays after, church members looked wistfully at the parking lot because George's car was no longer seen there. Several months later, on Easter Sunday, George's car again appeared, and George went into church. The preacher delivered a stirring resurrection sermon and then, as was his custom, invited the members of the congregation to respond. No sooner had the words left his mouth than George stood up and with deep emotion said firmly, "Rosie lives!" And then he began to sing: "My wild Irish Rose, the sweetest flower that grows . . ."

   i. Let’s pray.