

April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday Rev. Kathryn McGinnis

Let us pray,

Savior God, we need your good news. We need the challenge of your Holy Spirit. We need this time of Word and worship. Help us to tune our hearts and minds to your will and your way as we approach the Scriptures today. Amen.

Our scripture today is from the gospel of Luke, chapter 24, verses 1- 12. listen now for the word of the lord.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

What is resurrection? What IS resurrection? Just take a minute to pause. Have you ever just sat and wondered, truly wondered - what is resurrection?

As Christians, we talk about resurrection, Christ's resurrection, all the time. That is the reason we're joyously gathered here today, to celebrate Christ's resurrection. It's the reason we even have a church at all. The reason why even have this community.

But what is it?

I think it's all around us - resurrection.

I love the theme of resurrection because of the ways in manifests in the earth itself. In the rising of the sun - each day a resurrection of new life - a mystery of what the day ahead could bring. The earth is connected together through resurrection.

We say it on ash Wednesday - you are dust and to dust you shall return. But from the dust we return to, comes new life, made of our dust.

My seminary had a farm, and the director of the farm program was also a professor - and he would teach about the theology of compost.

We throw away our food scraps, weeds, cut grass, tree clippings, dead plants - all that we no longer want nor need - dead things. We put them into compost.

And then that compost is added to the soil and from that soil comes new life - flowers, plants, trees, the beauty of the earth, the food we eat - it is all resurrected from the dead of compost. Resurrection.

Thus we taste resurrection. It is resurrection that nourishes our bodies, fuels our growth, sustains our lives. It's all resurrection.

That early morning after the sabbath, the women come with spices to the tomb - ready to do the final ritual to say goodbye to their friend, ready to have closure. But that is not what they get.

When they arrive, they find the tomb empty - leaving them perplexed, confused - as I think we all would be. And then two men in dazzling clothes appear and tell them Jesus isn't there. He is risen.

And they are afraid - again, as I think we all would be. And they don't understand. So the men tell them to remember - remember what Jesus said. And the women left and told the disciples and everyone that Jesus was risen.

I wonder if they even truly understood what they were saying.

What it meant for Jesus to have risen - because they didn't see Jesus. They didn't see the resurrected Christ.

They had to remember what Jesus had told them - that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again - and believe.

When they tell the disciples no one believes them. Even though the disciples had every reason to believe them.

These women - Mary, Joanne, Mary and the other women - they had been with Jesus from the beginning. They were with him all the way back in Galilee where Luke tells us they provided for Jesus from their resources.

They stayed with him throughout his ministry and journey into Jerusalem and were there when he was crucified, and they watched him die when others left, then they stayed further and watched as he was buried.

They prepared the spices, and they were the ones who went to the tomb as soon as the sabbath had ended.

No one else. Not the disciples. It was the women.

Yet - the disciples didn't believe them. Maybe the disciples didn't believe them because women were not held in high regard in first century Palestine. I think that is partly the reason.

But I also think they didn't believe because why would they? Who would believe in such a crazy thing as resurrection?

As Anna Carter Florence says: "Resurrection turns the world upside down - if the dead won't stay dead, what can you count on?"

What can you count on?

Christ's resurrection shows us that God's ways are not our ways. God is doing a new thing - each and every day - and it is impossible to believe.

But believe we must.

In that empty tomb, when the two men in dazzling clothes appear, the first thing they say to the women is "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

To believe in resurrection we cannot look for Jesus among the dead - the things of old. Jesus is not there.

He is risen to new life. What are the empty tombs we long to return to, hoping to find the gospel?

Are they the routines we cling to just because it is always the way things have been done? Because they are safe and comfortable.

Is it our longing to always look back - fantasizing about how great we think things used to be - instead of looking forward with wonder to the way things could be.

These are our empty tombs. Do we return to empty tombs in ourselves? What parts of ourselves, that as we grown and change, we no longer need - but we cling to regardless.

What parts of our selves do we need to leave in the empty tomb in order to have new life in resurrection?

I once heard that when you die in this world, you make space for resurrection.

Do we have the courage to let those things die, the ways of old - to make space for resurrection?

On easter Sunday we read about that empty tomb - that tomb where Jesus used to be, but is no longer there. Yet our charge is to not focus on the empty tomb, but to leave it and share with all the joy of new life in christ.

To see all the ways the resurrected Christ is manifested in our lives and world today. And strangely enough, the paradox of it all is that even though our charge is to leave the empty tomb for Christ is not there, in order to seek christ in new life, we must remember.

Just as the women went to the tomb to remember - to remember their beloved friend and the life he lived and the love he gave - in order to leave the tomb the two men tell them to remember. Remember that the son of man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.

In order to live in resurrection, in new life here and now - we must, as Alan Culpepper tell us, "remember what Jesus had done and what he had taught. Remember the meals in Jesus' fellowship, his healing and his parables, the bent woman and the 10 lepers. Would you understand the meaning of the empty tomb? remember Galilee."

It is the charge to remember that grounds the mystery of resurrection in the everyday world of human living as well as in the demanding communal ethic that Jesus taught.

For if remember what Jesus did - and we do our best to live his teachings - it is there that we see new life spring forth.

It is there that the hope of resurrection is made manifest. It is there that the darkness is overcome.

I keep coming back to the women. Because the importance of the women in the resurrection narrative in all the gospels cannot be overstated. In EVERY GOSPEL, it is *the women* who go to the empty tomb on the morning after the sabbath and receive the message of Christ's resurrection.

In every gospel, it is *the women* that share their testimony of Christ's resurrection to the disciples.

These women were the first to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. These women were the first preachers ordained by God to share the good news - not the disciples.

They preached it before anyone, including themselves, including the disciples, even understood what the resurrection meant.

But the women believed enough to proclaim it boldly and with joy.

And it is because of their testimony, their sermon, that we are all here today.

For they shared, and others listened and bore witness and took that testimony and spread it further, until a community was formed that has lasted two thousand years.

Now, Luke tells us no one believed them - the disciples called it an idle tale - (our translations are kind to us here - the word in greek translated as idle tale is a bit more crude than that)

BUT even if no one believed them, their testimony was enough for Peter to wonder.

He had to go to the empty tomb to see for himself. And there he saw the linen cloths by themselves and was amazed.

How would Peter have gone to see for himself if there was no first preacher who told the idle tale?

And we know that from that amazement Peter did eventually believe and share the good news far and wide.

Shared his testimony.

When we share our testimony - when we preach the gospel- maybe the point is not whether or not we are believed - for the gospel is so scandalous its not believable.

The women, when they preached, they were close enough to what matters when we preach the gospel- to inspire amazement, to inspire wonder.

For belief in the resurrection comes not from understanding exactly how it happened - we don't know what happened from the Friday he was crucified to the morning he was resurrected.

But we see the resurrected Christ all around us. We see resurrection.

Not in the ways old - but in the ways new life springs forth. From the rising of the sun - to the harvest from compost. Christ is bringing about resurrection.

So on this Easter Sunday - let us follow the women - and leave the empty tomb behind, but remember what Christ has taught us.

And then proclaim with bold joy the testimony of the gospel - that the ways of old are gone - and in Christ a new world is birthed - a world turned upside down.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Thanks be to God.

Amen.