

We are the Sermon! Reading: Luke 24:1-12 Easter Sunday/C 4/20/25
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Alleluia Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, today, on this Easter Sunday, WE are the sermon. We are the people who have gathered today to celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection. We are the ones who have made a commitment in baptism to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and to walk in his ways of compassion and mercy. We are the ones called to witness to the good news of Christ. So as you think about the Easter Story that was read today (according to the gospel of St. Luke), where do you see yourself in this story? Are you part of the women's contingency at the tomb, wanting to help in any way you can? Are you one of the dazzling messengers bringing the good news of resurrection? Maybe you're more like one of the women who witnessed to what she had seen and heard at the tomb? Or perhaps, you are one of the doubters who refused to believe? Let's take a closer look at today's gospel reading and see where each one of us might fit into this story.

"On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee, came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared." (Luke 24) After having seen a hasty burial of Jesus' body on Friday, these women immediately began to prepare the spices to anoint his body in order to complete the burial ritual. But because of the Sabbath restrictions, they had to wait until Sunday morning.

Some of these women who came to the tomb, had personally witnessed the cruelty of the crucifixion. But instead of throwing in the towel in despair or hiding in the upper room from the horrors of these events, they put one foot in front of the other, doing what they could do, which was to complete the anointing process. Perhaps you are one of those people who refuse to be immobilized in the face of injustice and intimidation. You are the ones who "do what you can, when you can." You do not shy away from conflict or disappointment but rather roll up your sleeves, remain connected, and proceed with whatever remaining tasks need to be done. You are the ones who are a testament to an unwavering faith and courage in the face of adversity. Thank you for being you!

Now after arriving at the tomb and finding no body to anoint, the women are then greeted by two men in dazzling clothes who ask them: *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen."* Perhaps you find yourself as one who continues to look for the living among the dead; one who lives in the past. It is easy to do, isn't it? Living in the past is safe and familiar and does not require us to change, either in the way we think or live. Many people in our country long for a past that is no longer possible in the 21st century. We now live in a world that is populated with over 6 billion people, all wanting a piece of the pie.

Many of us are guilty of fruitless searches, based on some of our most beloved memories of the past. This selective thinking is called *nostalgia* which (in reality) is actually "distorted remembrance." You see, nostalgia only remembers half of the story, a selective memory that leaves out many of the more painful facts. For instance, the year 1957 is often remembered as the pinnacle of life in America. It has been remembered as a time when a family of four could live on the husband's salary. In those days, it seemed as if all was safe and sound; when Christian Churches were bursting with people, and Sunday Schools were filled with children.

What many have forgotten about those times is the plight of people of color who were denied voting rights, entrance to hotels, schools, libraries, and neighborhoods. In the south, they were still being lynched and forced to drink out of water fountains designated for "colored only." In 1957, the Arkansas National Guard was called up by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus to bar nine black students from attending the previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. These kinds of painful incidents are left out of nostalgic thinking and are currently being erased from our Federal Data Base. Even our teachers are being pressured to "whitewash" over this painful period in our country. But there were more who were discriminated against. For instance, people of Jewish origin were often denied access to most country clubs. Women were only earning about 60% of what a man earned for the same job and were denied a credit card under their own name.

You see, we have a tendency to glorify the past as well as linger in the past, or as Luke calls it, "to seek the living among the dead." We grasp onto our loved ones who are dying. Instead of allowing them to die in dignity, we encourage them to undergo one more painful medical treatment to extend their lives for a short time. We cling to a former vision of ourselves and of our churches, as if they might come back to life by doing what we have always done in the past.

I know for myself, I sometimes long for that time when I could honestly say: “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors, and there’s all the people.” Yet despite that longing, I truly believe that out of the ashes of destruction, new life can and does occur. I hold onto the visionary words of the prophet Isaiah where God reminds us: “I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.” (Is. 65:17-18) I don’t know exactly what this “new heaven and earth” will look like, but I sure hope I will recognize it as it evolves.

Well, after the interaction with the dazzling messengers, the women then returned from the tomb to tell the others what they had seen and heard. It was these very women who first witnessed to the resurrection, women who were also perplexed with the idea that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Yet despite their confusion, they were willing to let go of old ideas and shine a new light on new possibilities. Maybe you are one of those persons who shines a hopeful light on the good news, refusing to dwell on the past. You are the faithful ones, those who are willing to believe that “with God all things are possible.”

I recently read an excerpt from Madeline Albright who was Secretary of State from 1997-2001. After being told later in life about the cataclysmic events of her childhood which included the deaths of three of her grandparents in Nazi concentration camps, she said: That is “not what I will take with me as I move to life’s next chapter. In the world where I choose to live, even the coldest winter must yield to agents of spring and the darkest view of human nature must eventually find room for shafts of light.” This kind of thinking is resurrection thinking in modern times!

Perhaps the apostles and the others who were hiding out in the upper room, were still inhabiting that darkest view of human nature, ruminating on death of their beloved teacher. And so when Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James showed up and reported the news of the resurrection, the apostles just couldn’t wrap their heads around this miracle. Remember, these women had had first-hand experience at the tomb. They were of good character and many in number. They had followed Jesus in Galilee and supported him and his disciples in their ministry. And yet their witness was simply dismissed as an “idle tale.”

Perhaps you can relate to Peter who was part of the doubting contingency. Maybe current scientific logic keeps you stumped from embracing the possibility of resurrection. Maybe you have your doubts because you are struggling with the discrepancies between the four different gospel accounts. If so, know you are not alone. Remember, even some of Jesus’ closest disciples had difficulty. No amount of explanation can adequately explain the meaning and significance of Easter. It is not so much the persuasion of an empty tomb that engenders faith, but rather a personal encounter of the risen Lord. I pray that one day, all of you will have an experience of the risen Christ that will delight your heart and strengthen your faith.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are the sermon! It is time for each one of us to join hands as people of the resurrection, believing in Love’s redeeming work! We are the ones who are called to witness the good news to those who are afraid. We are the ones who are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We are the ones who are called to do what we can, spreading compassion and mercy to all of God’s people including the lost, the lonely, and the left behind. We are the ones to speak the truth, even at our own peril. Resurrection means that “God continues to break into our world with hope and new life, even in the places that are barren, broken, and bombed.”

And so we continue to pray: “Insistent God, relentlessly call forth new life from the places consumed by death...and tune our hearts to the symphony of your reckless love.” (Bishop Deon Johnson)

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