

“The Beginning of Something New”

Easter 1C-19

Luke 24: 1-12

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“The Beginning of the New”

Let’s be honest—this isn’t new to us. Most of us have done something like this before. Maybe many times before. Donning the Easter outfit. Families taking pics of the kids. Perhaps they’re plans for a special Easter meal later... or the Easter breakfast this morning.

The same holds true for worship. Each year, we’re greeted by a sanctuary dancing with sights and smells of blossoms and the great sounds of Easter’s Alleluia’s. I mean, we know the Easter refrain... I’ll say the first part, you say the second part. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.**

So no... this isn’t really new.

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But why would it be, right? The story is over 2000 years old. Granted, we’ve received multiple versions of it. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul... they each tell it a bit differently... but the essence is the same. Depending upon the version we read... either Mary Magdalene or a group of women, including Mary, went to Jesus’ tomb to grieve and do the important if painful work of anointing his lifeless body for its burial. But as they approached the tomb amid the faint dawn of morning light, they wiped the tears from their eyes to see the tomb’s stone had been rolled away.

They looked in. The body was gone!

The women—they’re dumbfounded. Shocked. But *we’re* not, are we? The women had no idea what was going on, but you and I got through Thursday’ last supper and betrayal and Friday’s thorns and nails, in part, because we knew what this morning held in store.

It’s just not new to us the way it was for the women. They were living it all for the first time. In Mark, Matthew, and John, an angel appears before the women. But in Luke, it’s two dazzling white messengers. In Mark, the women are amazed and terrified. In Matthew, it’s the Roman guards at the tomb who quake in fear. But in Luke, the story we read this morning, the women bow their faces to the ground in both fear and awe.

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In all, whatever version we read, I think the women’s reaction to resurrection is more appropriate than yours and mine is today. Familiarity with the story has made us rather immune to the fear and awe those women felt as the angels greeted them. They had no idea what to do with this brand-new reality that just broke through every boundary they’d ever known, obliterating death, breathing grace-filled life where previously none existed.

Those women were experiencing first-hand one of the most important lessons we learn from Easter. *God’s ways are not our ways.* God can’t be confined by our assumptions. God doesn’t care that we expect death to be the end. That we expect brokenness and loss to have the

last word. No. God is—and always will be—far greater... far more creative... far more resilient and generous than we expect.

I mean, Easter reveals how God is always working to surprise us with good news, right? Perhaps the biggest of which is that what *seems* like the end of the gospel—the story of resurrection—is really just the beginning. That resurrection, rather than the end of the Good News, is really just the kick-off to a brand-new way of life God intends creation to make manifest.

Luke foreshadows this in the question the angels ask the women as they come to the tomb looking for Jesus' body. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" they ask. "He isn't here, but has risen," they say.

It's wonderful, glorious good news. But it's also a ridiculous question, isn't it?

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" the angels ask.

Clearly, the women didn't go to the tomb in order to look for the living. They were expecting to find death. That's what you expect when people die, right? That's what you expect when hopes fade... when options run dry... when hearts break. You don't go to a graveyard of broken bodies or broken dreams looking for life.

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But here's a good rule when reading Scripture. When you read something that *seems* ridiculous, don't dismiss it. It's probably a good place to dig in... because there's almost always a well of divine truth behind what seems ridiculous to us.

So let's dig in. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

It *is* ridiculous to ask this of the women, who'd never experienced resurrection before. But would this be a ridiculous question to ask people who, say, already know about resurrection... who even proclaim to believe in it... trust in it... and yet, still, they keep searching and looking for life amid old graveyards?

You see, Luke knows exactly why the women were looking for the living among the dead that first Easter morn, but he doesn't understand why you and I keep doing it. Why do we, you and me, Towson Presbyterian Church, why do we keep looking for the living among the dead?

We who believe in resurrection... We who believe God not only breathes new life into broken lives but also our broken world...

Why do we cling to the dying ways of the world instead of searching for what God is making new? Do we ever look for it? Do we dare expect it? That's what Luke wants to know.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" he asks.

Why do we hold tight to the corpses of old routines and old pursuits sucking the life out of us, when God is raising up new opportunities and dreams for the taking?

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" the angels ask.

Why do we keep forgetting the lessons we've already learned the hard way? That money can't buy happiness. That wealth never leads to the kind of security that really matters. That popularity and prestige never bring the kind of fulfillment we're so hungry for.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" resurrection asks.

We know God wants us to do away with all the worldly measuring sticks. We know God calls us “beloved” and “precious” and remembers our sins no more. We know God has blessed with special gifts and a divine calling to use them to be a blessing in this world. But we don’t look at ourselves that way.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Luke asks.

We know Christ came to tear down the divisions we keep creating. We know Christ was clear when it comes to loving our neighbors as ourselves. We know it’s the last who come first in God’s kingdom... the outcast... the poor... the despised... those imprisoned by society’s walls of prejudice. But we keep creating insiders and outsiders... building walls... labeling some as undeserving and others as unwanted because they don’t make a certain living or they don’t share a certain background or they don’t carry certain documentation papers.

“Why do you keep looking for the living among the dead?” resurrection asks.

And the Church knows it must take risks if it wants to faithfully follow Christ. The Church knows it can’t just sit on its laurels if it wants to seek and spread the new life Jesus is raising. But the church gets bogged down in busyness. We focus too much on doing things the right way instead of simply doing the right things. We worry that justice is too risky to pursue as we utter resurrection’s most antithetical words, “We can’t do that.”

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

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We’ve heard it so many times. We know the story. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, we say.

Because it’s familiar, we approach resurrection as we do every other facet of our life... expecting more of the same.

Except resurrection means nothing is the same as it was. Resurrection means this world’s ways are forever broken, even if the world doesn’t know it yet. Resurrection means not even death can stand in the way of God blessing us with newness of life and fresh possibilities where none previously existed.

But do we look for it? Do we expect it? In our daily living, do we allow ourselves to let go of the old long enough to scan the horizon for what Christ is raising up?

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Friends, the angels’ question, “Why do you look for the living amid the dead?”... it’s really the Gospel’s charge to us. It’s Luke’s charge to stop standing amid the graveyards of broken bodies, lost hopes, old grudges, and broken societal systems, and start seeking the new ways of life shared by the One whose love is forever challenging our assumptions and defying our expectations.

So let’s take Easter to heart in all of its newness. Instead of looking for the living among the dead, instead of living captive to the ways of this world... let’s start looking for life amid the new! That’s where resurrection is raising new possibilities. New hopes. New dreams. New challenges. New calls. New priorities. New life, in the here and now...

So let’s say it like the brand-new reality it is. Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed.**

Now let’s go live like it.

Amen.