Finding Resurrection

Easter C-22

Luke 24: 1-35

4/17/22

**Prayer for Illumination—R**

**Luke 24: 1-35—J**

But on the first day of the week,

at early dawn,

they came to the tomb,

taking the spices that they had prepared.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

but when they went in,

they did not find the body.

While they were perplexed about this,

suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

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.

Remember how he told you,

while he was still in Galilee,

that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners,

and be crucified,

and on the third day rise again.”

Then they remembered his words,

and returning from the tomb,

they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene,

Joanna, Mary the mother of James,

and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.

But these words seemed to them an idle tale,

and they did not believe them.

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.

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Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus,

about seven miles from Jerusalem,

and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing,

Jesus himself came near and went with them,

but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them,

“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas,

answered him,

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know

the things that have taken place there in these days?”

He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth,

who was a prophet mighty in deed and word

before God and all the people,

and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over

to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Yes, and besides all this,

it is now the third day since these things took place.

Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.

They were at the tomb early this morning,

and when they did not find his body there,

they came back and told us

that they had indeed seen a vision of angels

who said that he was alive.

Some of those who were with us went to the tomb

and found it just as the women had said;

but they did not see him.”

Then he said to them,

“Oh, how foolish you are,

and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things

and then enter into his glory?”

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,

he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going,

he walked ahead as if he were going on.

But they urged him strongly, saying,

“Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them,

he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

*Then* their eyes were opened,

and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other,

“Were not our hearts burning within us

while he was talking to us on the road,

while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem;

and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.

They were saying,

“The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”

Then they told what had happened on the road,

and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

“Finding Resurrection”

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Do you think it really happened like that?

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What… Easter?

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Yeah… Do you think Jesus’ followers really encountered resurrection the way Luke says they did?

With a group of women entering the tomb and finding an angel… telling them that Jesus was raised… and to go tell the disciples? Only for the disciples not to believe them?

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Well, it’s a good question to ask. While the resurrection story is one of the few stories all four gospels share… the truth is… they don’t agree on exactly what happened that first Easter morn.

For example… just who, exactly, were the first ones to go to Jesus’ tomb that day? Matthew, Mark, and Luke suggest it was a group of women… but John notes it was just Mary Magdalene and two disciples.

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And how… exactly… was the stone removed from the entrance? Matthew says there was an earthquake… but no other gospel mentions anything of the sort.

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And just how many angels were there? Matthew, John, and Luke insist there were two, but Mark says there was only one.

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Were there Roman soldiers guarding the tomb’s entrance, as Matthew claims? Or, was the tomb rather deserted, as the other gospels suggest?

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The truth is… we don’t know the finer details of *exactly* what happened that first Easter morn, which can make us uncomfortable. We want to know the facts… because facts can proven or disproven. And when it comes to the very heart of the Christian faith… many would love *prove* resurrection, right? We want to be able to point at it. Measure it. Examine it. Demonstrate its validity and its veracity. We want to know, for sure, that this happened.

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But perhaps even more than that… when it comes to something as mysterious and confounding as resurrection… we also want to know what happened… because we want to know what to look for in our own lives. We want to know how to spot it. Or better yet, we want to know how to encounter it on this side of the grave. Because we believe resurrection isn’t just a one-time thing… but the way in which God keeps on bringing new life and love into a broken world.

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And yet… when we look at the gospels for details, it’s hard to know exactly what to look for… because each portrays resurrection from a different perspective.

Take John, for example. John tells the story of Mary Magdalene weeping so deeply at the tomb… that even though Jesus is standing next to her… talking to her… she mistakes him as a gardener. “Please, she cries, “tell me where they’ve taken the body of my Lord.” She simply can’t see clearly through the haze of her tears. As we know, the world looks different, sounds different, it even tastes different amid the weight of our grief.

And yet… when Jesus called her by name… she responded, “Rabbouni,” or “my teacher.”

So according to John, even when we think our grief will swallow us whole and we’ll never see clearly again… resurrection still finds a way to break through and call us by name, inviting us to see new life we didn’t think was possible.

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According to Mark, on the other hand… resurrection doesn’t just break through… it sends shockwaves down the spine.

Remember… in Mark, when the women first encounter the angels in the empty tomb and hear the Good News that Jesus has been raised… instead of celebrating and rejoicing, Mark says they were filled with both “terror and amazement.” So they ran away from the tomb as fast as they could.

Which may be… it may just be… the most appropriate response we see. Or at least the most authentic. For how else do people respond when the ways of the world are turned upside down? Most of the time, we’re not ready for our world to change. Most of the time, we’re not even looking for the new life God is perpetually seeking to raise up. But even more than this, we’re not ready for God to change the world through us.

After all, the women didn’t run away in fear when they first saw the angels. They ran when the angels told them to go and share the Good News.

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And yet according to Luke—the lesson we read this morning—the women had a radically different response when they encountered an angel in the empty tomb. Rather than running away in fear at how the world had change… the women became vessels of resurrection life as they immediately went to the disciples to proclaim that Jesus had been raised.

Yet, while the women believe and proclaim the Good News… it’s the male disciples who, instead of rejoicing, scoff at the news. It didn’t seem to matter that Jesus had already told them he’d be raised on the third day. Luke says the women’s report seemed to men an “idle tale.” The stuff of nonsense and fantasy.

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After all… resurrection is hard to believe. It’s one of the reasons we want to know exactly what happened on that first Easter mon. It’s why we want to know what resurrection looks like. What it sounds like. What it feels likes… so that we might more easily trust in something as preposterous as resurrection claims to be.

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Thankfully, Luke’s version of resurrection doesn’t end with the disciples’ disbelief, but picks up later that same day.

Evidently, two disciples were heading towards a town called Emmaus. Along the way, they were talking about everything that had just happened—Jesus’ death and how it’d all gone so wrong so fast; plus the news that the women had shared that seemed too absurd to believe.

It was then that the resurrected Jesus came up and asked what they’d been talking about. But the disciples didn’t recognize him. Perhaps, like Mary in John’s gospel, their eyes were still blurred by tears.

Still… they kept talking with Jesus about everything that had happened until they finally arrived at a village. There, after quite a while together, they sat down and shared a meal, in which Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

It was then, Luke says, that the disciples finally recognized resurrection in their midst.

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We don’t know how long there were together, but we can assume it was quite a while.

These disciples had the resurrected Jesus in front of them the whole time—but they couldn’t see resurrection life staring them in the face.

So, clearly, according to Luke, resurrection isn’t always obvious. Sometimes, it requires patience… and persistence. We need to give ourselves time to be able to recognize the new life that has been raised around us. As well as within us.

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So… what happened on that first Easter morn? What, exactly, does resurrection look like? Just how can we spot what God is raising up around and within us?

Transparently, there’s no clear-cut answer. According to the Gospels, resurrection appears differently at different times… and has many different expressions.

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According to Mark… it can appear suddenly… causing us both fear and amazement at how different life is amid the kingdom of God.

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According John… it can surprise us when we least expect it. Even amid grief so deep we were sure would it would swallow us whole, resurrection can call us by name, inviting us into hope.

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And according Luke… as the disciples make clear… sometimes it just takes time see the new life resurrection makes possible. Sometimes we need to be patient with ourselves… trusting that the God of resurrection is with us… even when we can’t see it.

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Ultimately, what Scripture reveals in all of its Easter expressions, is that resurrection is not a burden to be proven or a one-time event that either happened or didn’t. **Resurrection is Good News to be trusted.** Good News that God is and always will be with us, acting for us… raising up new life around and within us… beckoning us to trust and pursue the Kingdom of God that nothing—nothing—can conquer.