

Scriptures:

Luke 24: 36-48

### **Faith, Hope and Doubt**

After Jesus appears to his much loved disciples and offers them Shalom (Peace) he reminds them that “You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48; Acts 3:15). How often do we need reminders of the resurrection? Even those who were there seemed to need to be reminded over and over again. Reminded that they were witnesses to the truth. The whole Easter story is riddled with fears, doubts, disbelief, wonderings and miraculous epiphanies. I find that a little reassuring really. Most of us have a strong faith that is mixed with doubts. Most of us know how we should live and be because of our faith but we mix it up all the time. Paul says I do not do the good I want to do but the evil I do not want to do.

We too have been witnesses but we also need reminders of the resurrection. Karoline Lewis writes “Left to our own devices, left to the way in which life returns to normal after Easter, left to planning the last big worship push before summer, (*or our final worship in this building*) left to looking toward the end of the program year, (*or the end of the way things have been for this community for a very long time*) left to confirmations and graduations, it’s all too easy to forget the resurrection.

Easter Sunday, only two weeks past, seems like an eternity ago, doesn’t it? And in many ways, it is. Because that’s how *life and* ministry works. The church goes on. Life goes on. Since Christ has been raised from the dead, all kinds of ministry acts have... taken place:”<sup>1</sup> funerals, new members, study groups, birthdays, counselling sessions, hospital visits, commendations of the dying. Sure, we can see the resurrection promise in each of these experiences, but it does take some effort, and reminders.

“As a result, resurrection has the tendency to be a less than present reality, more likely a claim about a past event or a future assurance. Why is the presence of resurrection often overlooked? Understated? Even denied? Why do we seem to be more comfortable keeping resurrection in the past or postponing its promises for the future? Why is it so difficult? What are we afraid of? Why is life, here and now, so hard to see?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3587>

<sup>2</sup> IBID

If we go back and read the stories of the resurrection from the various gospels we will quickly realize we are not alone in our forgetting of promises, and in our life altering experiences. David Lose wrote “Here’s my brief take this vignette from Luke’s larger narrative about the resurrection appearances of Jesus: if you don’t have serious doubts about the Easter story, you’re not paying attention...

For while the four gospels have many interesting variations in their account of Jesus’ resurrection, they are absolutely consistent on one thing: no one believes the good news of Jesus’ resurrection when they first hear it. No one. And that includes Jesus’ own disciples, the ones who were closest to him and spent the most time with him. In fact, that level of disbelief starts with the disciples. Earlier in the verses before this reading, Luke tells us that the disciples dismissed the testimony of the women who had been to the empty tomb as an “idle tale.” Actually, that’s not what Luke tells us, that’s the water-downed translation we’re used to. The Greek word Luke employs – *leros* – is the root of our word delirious. So in response to the testimony of the women, the disciples say they are out of their freakin’ minds. Nice.

But perhaps expected. You see, here’s the thing: the earth is generally unwilling to cough up the dead. And testimony that it has – that one who died has actually been raised – kind of upsets the natural order and causes you to lose confidence in pretty much everything you thought you could count on.”<sup>3</sup>

And yet what is surprising is that even when they come face to face with Jesus we still find them doubting. Perhaps it is because they, just like we, are so used to coming face to face with disappointment. Perhaps because life is often lived in the consciousness of death it is simply easier not to believe. When we watch the news, when we look around our world globally, communally, personally, the presence of death is more palpable than life. We are so often faced with death, grief, illness, despair, sorrow that it is hard to believe in the promise of life. It is easier for us to assume things will go wrong than trust they will go right.

“Thus far in Luke’s account, the disciples have heard and dismissed the women’s testimony, Peter then ran to the tomb and confirmed at the very least that it’s empty, two disciples on the road to Emmaus were encountered by Jesus and have returned to tell their tale, and...now Jesus has appeared among them and invited them to touch him to dispel any doubts they may have that he is real. And then Luke writes, “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering...”<sup>4</sup> Imagine. It is quite reassuring really that even the disciples in their joy were still disbelieving and wondering. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, it is most often a component.

“I also suspect that life, here and now, is hard to see because of fear: a fear of rejection; a fear that it could really be true. Seriously, what if the testimony of the women at the tomb was true? We are in good company when it comes to these fears.” The disciples found it hard to believe.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/04/easter-3-b-resurrection-doubts/>

<sup>4</sup> IBID

“Like the response to Jesus’ first sermon when the hometown folk want to throw him off a cliff (Luke 4:16-30), good news is rarely accepted at the first hearing. Why? Because rejection is easier than resurrection. If the resurrection really is true, well then, there goes life as we knew it. In the words of Anna Carter Florence, “if dead people don’t even stay dead, what is there to count on?” (Preaching Moment #10)

Life, here and now, is very hard to see. In the end, I think being resurrection people takes some effort, in fact, a lot of effort. And some weeks will demand more effort than others. Jesus knows this reality, our reality. And knows that we need a reminder. In fact, we probably need a lot of them, daily perhaps. Notice the tense of Jesus’ assertion -- not “you were,” not “you will be,” but “you are.” I have a feeling Jesus takes that seriously. You are witnesses, here and now, in this moment. In this life. In your daily life. For the sake of life. Jesus reminds us of who we really are -- resurrection people, resurrection witnesses.”<sup>5</sup>

At the board meeting last week we found ourselves making a lot of decisions about our future. Several of these decisions are requiring huge acts of faith. It is a whole lot easier for us to worry about how things will fail than it seems to be to believe all will be well. I think part of it is that we want to be able to control the outcome and well... we can’t. We can do our best to work to keep our community of faith together, to grow stronger, to trust that all will be well but we don’t know what our new congregational life and configuration will look and be like exactly.

I want to share with all of you, some of what I shared at our board meeting this week because as I have walk through the season of Easter I usually find myself completely focused on the resurrection of going forward, (After all that is the most important part of the story) and yet I have come to realize we as a congregation and leadership perhaps find ourselves in and heading into more of a “Holy Saturday” time. It is not that we have a brutal death like that of Good Friday but we do have without a doubt a death of the way things have been for many years, and so we can acknowledge that that brings grief and anxiety and curiosity.

Have you ever thought about the reality that after the death of Jesus on Good Friday the disciples did not know Sunday was coming. On Saturday they found themselves with grief, anxiety, uncertainty, questioning. They were not sure how to carry on with their lives, whether they should just give up all together or if they should carry the message of love Jesus lived and shared with them. They had no idea what the resurrection would look like and neither do we. Like with Jesus the dying that is taking place for us does not mean failure. And just as the resurrected Jesus was a different Jesus, the new life we will have will be different also. We find ourselves in a time with a lot of questions, uncertainties. We may feel like God is calling us to move forward but we don’t exactly know how. We may be scared of what it will look like if we don’t get it right. That is the easiest thing for us to do - worry. But I want to encourage us to choose another way. In this Holy Saturday moment we must surrender to the unknown and create space for the miraculous to happen.

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis

The season of Easter is more than a day in our church calendar because it takes a long time to really appropriate the meaning of the resurrection - that all manner of things shall be well - especially when we are consumed by our fear like that of the disciples, wondering if the Romans may be coming to get us next. When the anxiety ratchets up, we need to take a collective pause, share with others how we are feeling, minister to each other in our distress and then reconnect to our deeper sense of shared purpose about what we're about.

You are witnesses says Jesus, he then continues with the reminder that we have the spirit with us. We do not witness alone, as we sit amongst a community of fellow believers. We do not witness alone, soon we will celebrate pentecost that reminds us that as the Spirit is indeed coming, and coming soon (and for us is with us now). Our lives, on every level, need resurrection witnesses.

Lose continues "Faith is more tension-filled. It is acting as if something is true even when you have no proof that it is. Which means that when we talk about the "gathering of the faithful," we're not talking about the gathering of those who's faith/knowledge is absolute or certain or bedrock. We're talking about those people who have all kinds of questions and doubts but still find joy and wonder in this message of good news about new life. Or maybe who want to find joy and wonder, haven't yet, but keeping coming because of their hope."<sup>6</sup>

How would all of us live differently if we lived the resurrection life? How would we live differently if we acted like God's promises were true. So often, I think, these promises are so familiar to us that we hold them far back in our head but don't actually think about them and so don't act as if they are true. But if it's true that God raised Jesus from the dead... "If it's true that God promises to renew the whole creation and grant us new life... If it's true that nothing - nothing we've done or has been done to us - can separate us from the love of God... If it's true that God will not turn God's back on any of us but always reaches out to us in grace, mercy, and forgiveness... If any of this - let alone all of this - is true, then how might we live our lives this week differently? How might this faith - not knowledge, but trusting, courageous faith - change how we look at our relationships, and our politics, and our work, (our church) and our resources, and our future?

And if takes a little time to let all this sink in, to come to active trust and faith that these promises are true, well, then let's keep in mind that we're in good company. Jesus' first disciples struggled with all this as well."<sup>7</sup>

"the promise of resurrection, new life, and grace is so outlandish, so uncommon, and so desperately necessary that it has always elicited a measure of doubt. But it has also always elicited changed lives as well."

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<sup>6</sup> Lose

<sup>7</sup> Lose

May our lives be changed with the hope of resurrection, may we see the new life and opportunities God provides us everywhere we live and move and have our being.

Amen