

Remembering, Returning, and Reporting Resurrection

Luke 24:1-10 (NRSV and Inclusive Version)

by Patty Friesen (Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019)

Concluding Prayer: #179 Sing the Story purple

All four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John report an empty tomb three days after Jesus' crucifixion. All four are in agreement about the empty tomb, but each have their own version of *who* saw the empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of the risen Christ. In Matthew's gospel - it's Mary Magdalene and the other "Mary" who are first to the empty tomb. In Mark - it is Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Salome. In John's gospel, it's Mary Magdalene alone. In Luke's gospel it is a whole host of women - Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and the other women who followed Jesus from Galilee. These are the same women who were at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion, and then followed Joseph of Arimathea to where he buried Jesus' body. The next morning these same women come back to find the stone rolled away and the body gone and two men in dazzling clothes, who scold them for looking for the living among the dead. Was the stone rolled away to let Jesus out or to let the women in? Both movements are important.

For our biblical work this morning, we have two translations because both the NRSV and The Inclusive Version bring their strengths to our understanding. In verse 5 in the Inclusive Version, Jesus is the Living One, capital letters - as the One who owns life himself. *Jesus* is not here, *Christ* has risen. The historical earthly *Jesus* who was crucified has *died*, and he has been *resurrected* as *Christ*, the Messiah, the Lord of all

Life. Verse 7 Inclusive Version describes Jesus as the Chosen One - an action done by God as opposed to Son of Man, a more human title.

Verse 8 I prefer in the New Revised Standard Version: Then the women remembered Jesus words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. NRSV moves from remembering to returning to reporting - active and enthusiastic verbs.

In bible times, two male witnesses were necessary to provide legal proof of an event. This may be why there are two men in dazzling clothes. The word dazzling was last used at the Mount of Transfiguration, which causes some scholars to speculate that it could have been Moses and Elijah who were with Jesus at the resurrection. That makes a lovely parallel to the Transfiguration so with Moses and Elijah and the host of Marys, Luke stacks up the witnesses for a collective testimony to the resurrection that cannot be refuted, even though the disciples do not believe in verses 11-12. We have ended our resurrection today with verse 10 and the naming of the women witnesses just as Luke ended the crucifixion with the women at the cross, and ended the burial with the women watching and returning home to prepare spices. Today, they return again from the empty tomb, remembering the words of Jesus that he would rise again.

It is essential to us in the 21st century that this women of the 1st century *remembered* Jesus words. Most of us in our grief can't remember anything. Grief brain we call it as we stumble around in the days, weeks and months after the death of our loved ones forgetting where we put our keys and forgetting what day it is. Remembering Jesus' words and presence with them in the past, gives the women strength for reporting their present experience. The men in dazzling clothes tell them:

Remember Galilee. Remember what Jesus taught. Remember the meals with Jesus and the miracles. We can only begin to comprehend the meaning of someone's life and death if we remember them. Grief counselors encourage us to actively remember our loved ones who have died through making memory books, and returning to the cemetery or the home-place or other places of meaning. We see the disciples doing this. They return to Galilee. They return to fishing where they first met Jesus. They are actively remembering him and he appears to them. These appearances empower them then to courageously report on the resurrection, on such an amazing, perplexing and profound event.

It is not exaggerating to say the empty tomb seals the deal in our Christian faith. Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 echo in our conscience, "If Christ has not been raised, then our reporting has been in vain and our faith has been in vain...we are of all people most to be pitied." The New Testament never suggests that the death of Jesus would have been adequate for salvation alone and apart from Christ's resurrection. The two are fused so that neither can be considered apart from the other. It's not just that *someone* was raised from the dead but that *God* raised Jesus from the dead, and it is not just that *someone* was crucified but that the one who was crucified had proclaimed the kingdom of God, which cost him his life. The resurrection of Jesus is God's response to Jesus' death, God's vindication of Jesus and God's validation of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom to the poor, the outcast and the penitent.

In Greek, the word for resurrection is Anastasia, literally meaning an uprising; an uprising for all people in all times. The religious paintings or icons in the Eastern Orthodox churches show a resurrected Christ rising up then trampling down death,

literally Christ is standing on the head of Hades, the Greek god of death. And then Christ grabs both Adam and Eve by their wrists and leads them out of death. Beside Adam and Eve stand all the people of the Old Testament in an all inclusive uprising of all people for all time – past, present and future. It is a powerful symbol of an all encompassing uprising of all creation that we miss if we think Jesus is the only one resurrected.

The defining conviction of the Christian hope is that because Christ was raised from the dead, the grave is not the final reality of human experience. The age-old question of the philosophers and of Job 14:14, “If someone dies, will they live again?” has been answered. The tomb is empty. It is not surprising, therefore, that the empty-tomb report has often been the touchstone of debate. Rationalist interpretations were rejected from the very beginning in the early church: Jesus was really dead - he did not swoon. The women saw where he laid, they did not go to the wrong tomb. And the fact that the resurrection was entrusted to the unreliable witness of women proves something in itself. It is interesting that Peter is brought in later as a more reliable witness even though he doesn't believe it himself. If early Christians were trying to make this up, they should have been more organized and convincing. Their very doubt and clumsy reporting in the gospels make me believe.

Does our faith rest ultimately on the location of a stone or the position of the linen cloth? The question is closely tied to the meaning of resurrection. When Jesus was raised, he did not return to normal human life. He did not live another 30 years and die again. He appeared and disappeared at will, moving in and out of human perception of his presence. What, then, are the tangible evidences of resurrection? Do they consist in

the physical remains of the tomb, or in Jesus' continuing presence in the lives of those who hope for his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?

One way to reflect on the nature of the resurrection and the meaning of the empty tomb is to ask what we might see if Jesus' tomb had been equipped with a 21st-century trail camera. Would it capture Jesus waking up, taking off the wrappings, folding them and laying them to one side, pushing back the stone, and walking out of the tomb? Or would the image on the screen have been obliterated by a flash of light from a great energy source, and then reveal the grave wrappings lying there limp and empty?

While the Gospels all affirm that the tomb was empty, they point beyond the tomb to the post-resurrection appearances. For all the importance of the historical date, the Gospels ground our faith not on the stone and the linen cloths but on the presence of the risen Lord in human experience. It is not the persuasive power of the empty tomb but the persuasive power of our personal encounters with the risen Lord that lead to faith. It was that way for the women witnesses and it is still that way for us.

Every Easter morning we come to church, not in search of the empty tomb as evidence for the resurrection but because we have found resurrection to be real in our own experience. We remember Luke's resurrection story. We return to our own resurrection experiences of Jesus' presence with us in difficult times and we report with amazement that we have been brought to a more confident, trusting place in our relationship with God and the Risen Christ who will raise up all of creation someday.

Let's join together in an Easter prayer #179 in the purple Sing the Story Book.

Luke/John New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, pgs. 472-473