

## Is the Resurrection an Idle Tale

He is risen.

All of the best stories have layers to them. Whether it is a movie, a book, or just a story that someone tells you, the best stories are the ones that go beyond the obvious. Take the Lord of the Rings for example. A famous, and timeless tale (I have only seen the movies). One about orcs, goblins, elves, magical rings, and hobbits who just want a second breakfast. If you look at the top layer, the superficial layer The Lord of the Rings, is a story entirely irrelevant to us in this room. Unless someone in here is secretly a wizard. The story isn't really about Middle Earth, it is a story for all of us about how goodness can triumph over evil. Every great story has layers. One of my favourite books is called Pet Semetary, which on the surface is a piece of horror fiction about a mysterious burial site for pets. If you look deeper, it is a story about grief, and the hold that it can take in our lives. The best stories have more than one layer.

While the Easter story is different than Lord of the Rings, because I put my faith in the Easter story, it is a story nonetheless. One that has more than one layer. I think it can be easy to only look at one aspect of the Easter story and end up missing out on the bigger picture.

When it comes to the Easter story, we often focus on the cosmic, mysterious, and eternal nature of it. This is important, but it is also apparently confusing. This is evidenced by all of the atonement theories that explore how exactly Jesus dying and being raised from the dead saves us. Is it Christus Victor, where Jesus defeats Satan by overcoming death, and frees us from bondage? Is it Penal Substitutionary, where the sacrifice of Jesus quenches God's need for justice? Is Jesus death on the cross him paying a ransom that is on all of us? We can talk more about atonement theories if you want, I find them interesting, but this morning I only use them to illustrate how much thought and debate can go into understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus. Again, this is a crucial part of the Easter story. But we can easily miss out on the depth of the Easter story, if we only consider one layer. If the resurrection is relegated to an idea that only comes into play when we die, what does it mean for us now?

You may have noticed the sermon title in the bulletin, which is a question. “Is the resurrection an idle tale?”. This comes from some translations of our text this morning. It comes from how the male disciples, dismiss the women who testified about Jesus’ resurrection. I know the term “idle tales” doesn’t just mean sitting still, like idling a car, which is why the translation in the bulletin uses the term “nonsense”. But sometimes a word can trigger a thought, and the phrase idle tales, inspired what I would like to focus on this morning in regards to the resurrection. And that is the present, daily, physical layer of resurrection that is woven into the fabric of the world God created. I think the resurrection story can become an idle tale, if it is only about where we spend eternity. This is obviously not the case, because our belief in Jesus affects how Christians live daily. What does it mean to be resurrection people? What does it mean for the resurrection to be an active, vibrant tale, and not an idle one?

- Death and resurrection are a part of our world

Death and resurrection may seem like distant or abstract ideas to many of us. To others it feels more familiar, particularly in regards to death. This rhythm of death and resurrection is woven into how the world works. In front of our large picture window in Rosthern, there is a small flower bed. If you know me, you know I am not a gardener. Aside from removing a tree that managed to spring up in this flower bed, I have not done anything to manage this flower bed. The flower bed is south facing, and every single year an assortment of tulips spring up from this garden bed. In fact when we moved into the house, people came up to us and said “Your house always is the first to have tulips”. Every year they come, have a short season, and then they go away. Only to come up again the following spring. I apologize for my lack of biological understanding, but to me this seems like a cycle of death and resurrection, right outside my window, year after year. When animals die, their matter breaks down, and literally becomes a different part of our world. Death and resurrection are woven into the world that God has created.

We see death and resurrection not just at the end of days, or in the biology that surrounds us. It is also part of our development as human

beings. How many times do we see a passion of ours die, to make space and time for a new passion? We have friendships that matter immensely for a period of time, that end to make room for a new friendship for this time. Even if we are in relationship with the same people, the old dynamic has died and something new has grown. We do not engage with our families the same way throughout our whole lives. We are not the same people we were several years ago, with interests, personality traits and flaws dying to make room for something new.

I often think about the friends I have in my life that have come and gone, and come back again. Many of these relationships would not have stood the test of time if different dynamics hadn't died to make room for an adult friendship. Friendships, family ties, careers, businesses, passions, and parts of ourselves all "die" one way or another throughout life. New things, and new ways of being are resurrected in their place. Death and resurrection is all around us, and is something we all must navigate. This can be beautiful, but also difficult.

I think Jesus shows us a path forward in a world full of death and resurrection. We often want resurrection to be a return to the old state of being. Yet that isn't the case, things are always changing. Even when Jesus was resurrected, it was not a return to the old state of being. His relationship with his disciples was not the same. They were not the same people after witnessing this miracle. And Jesus did not remain with them, going about life the same way that he had before. I think the resurrection story is an active tale, because death and resurrection are all around us in a way. Right here and now.

- Choosing to believe in the resurrection means to be a hopeful person

To be fully honest, the death and resurrection of Jesus is something difficult to believe. Maybe you never have doubts, but I sure do. I would have a hard time proving to someone that a man executed 2000 years ago in the Palestine area, was raised from the dead, and that resurrected man has had a significant influence on my life. It is true, but I cannot prove it, I choose to believe it even when I doubt it. I try to have faith. Ultimately if we can believe in death and resurrection, maybe we can believe in

transformation, even when transformation seems impossible. There will be doubts, and fears, lapses and stumbles along the way. But to believe in the resurrection is to believe that God is never done with a situation. Nothing is too far gone. Not even death can stop the transforming message of Jesus. Following Jesus means making a choice to hope. I am guilty of not choosing hope. I am guilty of confronting fear with apathy instead of action. Guilty of choosing to put my head in the sand, instead of paying attention. Guilty of choosing cynicism instead of hope. Maybe you can relate to me, maybe you can't. If you can relate, there is no need for shame. The world is hard and confusing, and we all have to grow, and learn how to live in difficult times. My encouragement would be to choose hope. The kind of hope that allows us to believe in death and resurrection.

This hope can transform how we view the world around us.

We can look at a world torn apart by violence, and still believe in the possibility of peace.

We can look at the worst of humanity, and still choose to love them, and help them be better.

We can look at our biggest flaws, and know that God isn't finished with us.

When we look at the world with the hope that comes from believing in death and resurrection, it changes how we see things. More importantly, it will hopefully change what we do. I would like to highlight some groups and people that inspire me to keep hoping. And while not everyone believes in the death and resurrection of Jesus, these are some people that I think embody a radical hope.

- Examples of Radical Hope

Mennonite Action/Gaza Protesters/People in Gaza

This picture is of protesters from an organization called Mennonite Action. I became aware of Mennonite Action when they started speaking out against the Genocide happening in Gaza. I have found their voices, and the many others voices proclaiming a similar message inspiring. While

there have been previous conflicts and tensions in this area, the current Genocide against Palestinians has gone on for over a year and a half. In that time, at least 61,709 people have been killed in Gaza, including 17,492 children (Al Jazeera).

When I look at that death toll, and when I look at how long this has continued, I feel hopeless. I want turn my face and hide. I have often chosen to throw up my hands, and say there is nothing I can do. It is so easy to live in hopelessness, apathy and numbness. But there are so many strong people, who despite all of this, continue to do the most courageous thing. To keep hoping. The folks at Mennonite Action, who are still organizing protests. The students in schools who are risking deportation by speaking out. Organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace, who advocate for peace and reconciliation, because of their faith. And most importantly the Palestinian people, and journalists in the area who have not stopped speaking up about what is happening, even after so many months of suffering. These people, exemplify the radical hope that comes from believing death and evil can be conquered, through love and peace.

Prison Ministries (COSA, Micah Mission, Parkland Restorative Justice)

When I came and started working here, I quite distinctly remember hearing from several Mennonites in this area about their involvement in restorative justice projects. It was a bit of a newer concept to me, especially the Circles of Support and Accountability program, which provides support and accountability to sex offenders. They have a twofold phrase “No more victims. No one is disposable”. I was confronted with my lack of hope and grace when I first heard about this program. I think it takes a radical hope to believe that no one is too far gone. That change is possible for every human being, and every person has value. When we are willing to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, perhaps it can help us celebrate the rehabilitation of people that we often cast aside, the people that we might wish didn't exist. Hoping in death and resurrection is to hope that a person can die to the ways they cause harm, and be resurrected as a new, loving, and whole person in our society.

Conclusion

There are several layers to the Easter story. While Jesus death and resurrection is about atonement, salvation and eternal life, it is also about our daily lives. Death and resurrection are woven into the fabric of our world if we are willing to look for it. While it can be hard to believe in death and resurrection, to do so, is to choose hope. Hope is something that we all need, and hope is something that our world needs. Without hope it becomes too easy to cope with death and destruction with apathy, numbness and fear. But if we have hope, we can be energized to keep seeking resurrection in all things. May that hope in resurrection motivate us. Motivate us to cry out against injustice, when it feels like no one is listening. Motivate us to change ourselves and others, even when it feels like a lost cause. Motivate us to chase after peace, in a violent world. Motivate us to love our enemy, look out for the marginalized, and to keep on going. The death and resurrection of Jesus affects us now, in this life, not just in eternity. May we let the hope of resurrection into our lives this Easter. And may we let it affect how we live. Amen.