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Resurrection of Our Lord - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

I Corinthians 15:19-26

Luke 24:1-12

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Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The 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. 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But 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.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Alive!

Christ is risen! It's the same every time, and it starts about 4-6 weeks before Christmas and her birthday. Megan can't stand the surprise, the waiting, so she starts asking, "what did you get me?!" We've been together for around 15 years and she still refuses to believe that I won't tell her THIS time. She begins with just asking, but then she starts naming specific things to see if that's what I got. This continues up to the very day that she will get her gifts. On some level, you have to respect her commitment. I'm the direct opposite. I have no desire to find out what I'm getting, the surprise is half the fun! But humanity runs the whole gamut, some of us love a surprise, others, like Megan, really want to know, and some absolutely despise any surprises of any kind. Which one are you?

The women who are heading toward the tomb in today's Gospel lesson will be completely caught off guard. Surprised almost doesn't even begin to describe what they will experience. It's hard for us to realize how out of the world this whole tale truly is. I mean, almost everyone comes to church on Easter, and so they've heard the story time and time again. For us, the empty tomb is a given, but for the women, it will change everything they thought they understood.

We first need to realize that these ladies are 100% convinced that Jesus is dead. They go to the tomb planning to finish the burial rites that couldn't be finished before Passover and the sabbath three days before. They are carrying what is estimated to be roughly 100 lbs of spices, because as I've pointed out before, the dead tend to stink. What's the most

incredible is that they even went outdoors at all. The Jesus movement has been absolutely crushed. The male followers are locked behind closed doors, afraid that they will be the next to join the dead. All are convinced that this is over, that the one they thought would change it all has died.

But death is not the end. Nancy Claire Pittman writes that *“God’s ways are not our ways. They are beyond human comprehension; they subvert what we expect; they demand the impossible. They are holy precisely because they are not of our own making.”*¹ Holy and impossible are exactly the words that I would use too. I think I would have a few other choice words when I arrived at the scene. But when the women look into the very empty tomb they find themselves perplexed. (Talk about the understatement of the century!) Suddenly, two men in pristine white clothing appear and remind them of what Jesus had taught. The women storm back to the rest of Jesus' followers, recounting the details to the disciples. Can you imagine the absolute chaos of that recounting? A group of adults come rushing into a house, everyone talking at the same time, each person trying to speak louder than the other. But the male disciples do not believe. Robert E. Goss sarcastically points out that *“some of the male apostles are dismissive of the women... after all, they are emotional women, and their story is an ‘idle tale,’ pure nonsense. Yet the female disciples have a mandate from the angels to go back to the despondent male leadership, and they have the courage, the humility and the freedom to witness the good news that Jesus is risen.”*²

Have you ever noticed that the very first people to ever share the good news of Jesus Christ Arisen is a group of women? We often gloss over this,

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 351.

² Guest, Deryn. *The Queer Bible Commentary.* London: SCM Press, 2006. p. 544.

but it's a pretty big deal. Women in the first century had no legal protections, they would have been seen as inferior and would have had very little standing in the community. And yet it is this group of women that God chooses to be the very first to bear witness, the very first to share the good news. Because of these women, we are gathered here today to witness the same thing.

Remember what Pittman said? *“God’s ways are not our ways... they subvert what we expect, they demand the impossible.”* If you need a reminder of how God will turn everything upside down, just look at how the church has changed in the past two years. Heck, I’m basically a televangelist now, we have people who worship with us across the country, and Megan is our “tech” person. Who would have thought!

Yet, we fall prey to the same mistake that the women do. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?,” the angels ask. Again, Nancy Pittman calls us out, writing: *“We are just as guilty of such a fruitless search. We too want to tend the corpses of long dead ideas and ideals. We cling to former visions of ourselves and our churches as if they might come back to life as long as we hold on to them... The words of the unworldly messengers are a challenge to stop hanging on to the dead and to move into new life. They are reminders that the Holy One dwells wherever new life bursts forth.”*³

Now, take a deep breath. I’m not suggesting we cast off everything, I’m as much a fan of meaningful tradition as the next person, but I do think Pittman has a point. We cling to what is dead far too long, never realizing that God has called for us to stop looking in the graveyard.

³ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 351.

Because at the end of the day, something amazing has happened! We should be acting like Peter! You got to love the man, he doesn't deal with half measures. He sprints to go see what's happening, running around like a crazy man, leaving amazed and shocked at what he has seen. The Greek word we translate as amazed would better be translated as "absolute wonder."

So St. Paul's, I have a question. What dead thing are you holding onto that needs to be let go? Both personally and as a community. Are you fighting something that died years ago, maybe letting it define you long after it had any right? Let it go, you are alive and new. Does an old and decaying grudge have a hold of your heart? Why? Move on and let the rot go away. Do you yourself feel dead? Well boy, do I have good news for you. Sin and death have been defeated! God would not let them have power over us any longer. So, let us stop looking in the dirt, and turn our eyes to Jesus Christ, who changed everything we thought we knew. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia, amen.