

## “AN IDLE TALE”

### THE EPISTLE LESSON THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 24:1-12

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.

Let’s try it again. Christ is risen, Alleluia!

**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Doesn’t that feel good to say? After six weeks of the solemnity and seriousness of Lent, after the discomfort of remembering the Passover feast when Jesus ate his last meal, after the incredible pain of the betrayal and death of Jesus on a cross, isn’t it wonderful to finally have some good news? News good enough for hearty alleluias using our outside voices? Oh, let’s try it one more time.

Christ is risen, Alleluia!

**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

But wait. Do you really believe all this Easter stuff? Do you really believe that a huge stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb all by itself, and that Jesus’ body somehow vanished into thin air, only to reappear again later? What is resurrection? I know I’m supposed to believe in resurrection of the body, but truth be told, I don’t get it.

I know what resurrection isn’t. This aging body of mine with thinning hair and expanding waistline will not some day miraculously reappear exactly as it did on the day of my death. I hope not anyway.

I know what resurrection is like. I can talk about new life, transformation, and renewed hope through symbols and metaphors, like the story of the caterpillar. I can give you countless examples of earthly resurrection, but for resurrection of the body, I don’t have a single one.

Yet I’m here with you, ready to celebrate one of the most bizarre stories ever told, ready to sing and shout Alleluias in praise of God’s love as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some of you are thinking, “Yup. I’ve always had questions about resurrection too.” If you’ve thought about it at all, you’ve had questions. I agree with the preacher David Lose when he says:

“If It’s Not Hard to Believe, You’re Probably Not Paying Attention!”

If you’re thinking, “What kind of pastor is this who has trouble believing the most important story of the Christian faith?” remember the gospel story from Luke. Any of us who have trouble believing are in good company.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James heard from Jesus’ own lips that “that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” They didn’t understand either, because they still went to the tomb looking for him. They were terrified when they saw it empty. If it weren’t for the Holy messengers reminding them of Jesus’ prophecies, they would have remained clueless and afraid.

They run to tell the story to the disciples, the people who knew Jesus best. The disciples had heard the prophecies from Jesus’ own lips too.

Their response to the women? Pfft. An idle tale.

They had heard Jesus predict his own death and resurrection more than once and still had trouble believing the women’s story.

Now, “idle tale” is how the NRSV translates the Greek word *layros*. Calling it an idle tale makes the story sound gossipy and trivial, chatter from silly women. But the word *layros* is actually the root of our word delirious. The disciples dismiss their story as complete nonsense, drivel, total bull manure. (We’re in church so I am trying to be as circumspect as the Biblical translators.)

This is no idle tale. It is outrageous, alarming, and terrifying. It contradicts life as we know it. We all know “The only things certain in life are death and taxes.” If the dead don’t stay dead, what can we be certain of?

The death and resurrection of Jesus create an entirely new reality. Reality isn’t perfect, and sometimes it is downright awful – but at least we know what to expect. It is predictable and familiar, therefore comforting. Resurrection changes everything.

It’s an unbelievable story, an idle tale of epic proportions, yet you and I are here to celebrate its message, to sing and shout Alleluias in praise for God’s love as shown through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though we don’t know exactly what resurrection is.

Why do we celebrate even when we don't understand?

Because, like Mary Magdalene in the gospel of John, we have encountered Jesus, somewhere, somehow, sometime in our lives.

"Mary saw Jesus in the garden outside his tomb. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

Jesus didn't look like himself, but Mary knew him as soon as he spoke.

Mary Magdalene announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." She didn't bother trying to explain resurrection or any complicated theological concept. She skipped over the difficult details and went to the important part. "I have seen the Lord."

Luke tells us that 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. He had to see with his own eyes and encounter the story of resurrection on his own before he could believe it.

We all have our own tale to tell, a tale of an encounter with God that to anyone else would sound unbelievable, outrageous, and maybe just a bit crazy. We celebrate Christ's resurrection today not because we totally understand every word of what we confess in the Apostles' Creed, even and especially the part about the resurrection of the body.

But because we have seen something that makes us decide to let the questions, fears, doubts, and disbelief live in harmony with faith. Even if we can't pinpoint the moment, at some point we went looking for Jesus Christ and come home amazed at what had happened. Whether we went out and saw the abundance of our Creator God's gifts, felt the power of the Holy Spirit, or experienced the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ as it is manifested here on earth, or simply decided God is good, we have seen the Lord.

If you have trouble believing in idle tales, go look for yourself. No one has the same story as another, but we each have tales of hope and transformation. Whatever the life after death resurrection is, whatever being raised from the dead means, those things are not revealed to us.

But they aren't important because we get the message. Resurrection faith changes everything. Resurrection faith is about morning light after a long dark night, hope after despair, peace after conflict, release after suffering, freedom from sin and guilt.

Or as Frederick Beuchner puts it:

"Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing." Our eternal God makes sure of that. Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead so we would know that with God, there is hope.

Resurrection is an idle tale worth telling, and worth a few alleluias.

Christ is risen, Alleluia!

**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**