

I would like us to think through Luke's Easter story.

There are women who come to the tomb where Jesus' body has been laid. It is Sunday at dawn after Jesus has been crucified on Friday. They are there with spices to apply to his dead body. There is no custom yet of embalming, but this is a loving act by people who love Jesus. When they arrive at the tomb, they find the large boulder which has covered the entrance to the tomb rolled away. It is the first sign something is different.

It is only logical they go into the tomb and discover something really troubling. They do not find Jesus' body. Surely questions come to mind. "Why would someone want Jesus body? Afraid it might rise to life? Afraid it would be worshipped and Jesus would become a martyr? Why would they disrespect those who mourn his death?" Perhaps they know what others have said. If they can hold on to Jesus' body, it will not rise and everyone will see Jesus was a hoax.

What they do see are two men in brilliant clothing and the men tell them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Yet another sign something is different.

The men remind them Jesus said he would rise on the third day. They remember his telling them.

Slowly they are catching on. Slowly they are coming to believe something.

These women believe they have to tell Jesus disciples. You may remember they are hiding out of fear their dream is finished with Jesus' death and they will be caught and treated as he has been treated.

The verses move quickly. They go to tell Peter and the others and the very disciples who have given up everything to follow Jesus do not believe! They do not believe the story we just read! Luke's term for "an idle tale" in Greek is "usually reserved for the ranting of a person suffering from delirium." (351, Robbins)

Peter runs to the tomb and finds the linen cloths as the women have claimed. He is amazed at what has happened. We can imagine he remembers what the women have told him. He is beginning to understand something.

What we are doing is hearing again this story of the disciples as they hear the news of Jesus' being raised from death. It is beneficial to see even their initial hesitation about trusting the good news of these first women believers. Sometimes we are like them. We may hesitate to believe what it is true. We may well have questions about what the scriptures say. We may have hesitated a long time and still not believe this story.

Not one of us understands entirely what the invisible God of the universe is doing. If God says, "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth...", we wonder what this means. How can we ever know what this is about? We are mere human beings. We are slow to understand God creating new things and raising Jesus from the dead. *We are not completely in the dark though.* We have the benefit of those who have faith and we have the benefit of the insights gained from them. Let us consider how our gratitude helps us appreciate the good news of this story.

**First of all, few of us would be here if it were not for the testimonies of people we trusted.** We would not be here without the different kinds of testimonies offered by parents or teachers or trusted members who have

helped us think about the church's faith. Many here have come to believe this Easter story in different ways. We have our own stories to tell. I have been encouraged by some here who have come to believe by reading this story on their own. They have read these accounts and arrived at their own convictions about this Easter good news. We could say it has been the Spirit of God who has helped them claim this for themselves. The Spirit has worked in other ways. Others I know among us have taken a more traditional path. They have had trusted friends or family or camp counselors or neighbors who have helped them begin to understand this Easter truth.

Perhaps some here have asked the question many have asked. "Just how important is Jesus' resurrection from the dead anyway?" When I finally found someone who had an answer for me, he led me to Paul's chapter 15 in First Corinthians. Together we read, **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."** (1 Corinthians 15:17) I kept reading and found this. **"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died."** (1 Corinthians 15:20) My friend took me to other passages in the New Testament and showed me how Jesus' resurrection was foundational to faith in Christ. But, even after reading scripture that first time and hearing what my friend believed, I was not convinced. But, his faith and our conversations were not without benefit for me. From our several times talking about this, I began to realize thinking people can believe God raised Jesus from the dead. If you are like me, you may have taken your own time to begin to believe the truth of this story. This leads to a second reason for gratitude.

**Because of the faith and testimony of various people and experiences, we may be grateful for the wisdom we have gained.**

For example, I have personally come to appreciate several truths about Easter and Jesus' resurrection. If Jesus IS raised from the dead, then we have reason to take his life, ministry and teachings quite seriously. If he IS NOT raised from the dead, we should ask, "What are we doing here?"

If he is raised from the dead, his other miracles pale in comparison. We have great hope of interceding for the needs of a suffering world. We have great hope God answers prayer. We are encouraged to pray and as some people would say, "Put feet on our prayers" with our own compassion and work.

If Jesus is raised from the dead, we may be forgiven our sin. And we may experience hope and joy and peace and the love of God.

That Jesus rose from the dead is pretty amazing. The story suggests his being raised from the dead brings together people who have given up hope. If Jesus had not been raised, the disciples might have stayed in that room, afraid and worried that someone would find out they were ever with him at all.

I believe the hope of the church rests on its conviction about this Easter news. The hope of the church does not rest on you or me or any one of us. The church has claimed through the centuries, **"I believe...in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell, the third day He rose again from the dead..."** I believe we live on this conviction. We base the hope of our lives on this conviction.

I am not trying to convince you of this Easter message. Though I am trying, it is the Spirit of God who will do that. What we are doing is reminding ourselves of the events that Luke says took place.

We are announcing the good news of Jesus Christ: *Jesus of Nazareth was arrested and killed and God raised him from the dead.* His closest friends did not believe it at first. It took a while for them to realize what had happened. We can be encouraged by these first disciples and how they disbelieved. They saw and heard evidence and examined it for themselves. Their experience offers us a lesson. Though it took time to understand the truth of Jesus being raised, God built a movement that continues to transform people like you and me to this day. Today we hear again their *beginning to understand the truth.* We thank God they did. We can be grateful for those who have influenced us with their testimony and their understanding.

Robbins, Gregory A., "Pastoral Perspective," Luke 24:1-12, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2 Lent Through Eastertide, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2009.

**God of all truth and understanding, we offer our worship and praise here today for raising your Son our Lord from death. We are grateful for the hope of eternal life. We are grateful for the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation that is ours. Continue to change us with the good news of your undying love. So move among us that we may be instruments of compassion and witness for you in this neighborhood, in this city and in this world. Because of this Easter hope, we are bold to pray, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...**