

Sermon for Easter Sunday (2019)

Text: Luke 24: 1-12

Rev. Dr. David N. Young

He is Risen ... **He is Risen indeed!**

As children we learn these words on Easter. We say them during worship. We say them with each other.

He is Risen ... **He is Risen indeed!**

These words encapsulate the promise and assurance of hope that is the gift of this day

He is Risen ... **He is Risen indeed!**

Funny thing ... these cherished words that we so readily and faithfully share with each other were not spoken on the first Easter

Having returned from their mind-blowing experience at the empty tomb, we are told that the women come back and pronounce that “He is Risen”

However, instead of being greeted with “He is Risen, indeed”, instead of shouts of praise and alleluias, the response on the part of the disciples is unnerving

Luke, our Gospel writer, tells us that the disciples consider what the women share with them to be an “idle tale”

However, our Bible translators have softened this response a bit

Celebrated preaching professor Anna Carter Florence tells us that the word translated as “idle tale” is the Greek word *leros* and it occurs only once in the whole of scripture

And friends, it doesn't mean “idle tale”

No, this word, *leros*, is harsh, defiant, and dismissive

The word *leros* literally means “garbage” or “waste”

Now consider this for a moment ...

The disciples, i.e. the band of brothers who journeyed with Jesus and now have churches named after them, upon first hearing the news of the resurrection of Jesus, look around at each other, look at the women, shake their heads and collectively say that it is a load of garbage!

OMG!

Perhaps the resurrection has become tame for us

Perhaps, after all these years, we say “He is risen; He is risen, indeed” without the wonder it deserves

For our claim of the empty tomb is nothing less than astonishing, bewildering, and reality-changing

The empty tomb invites us to trust what we cannot see

The empty tomb challenges us to live fully even when life is not fully in our control

The empty tomb demands we seek to understand especially when things are difficult to understand

The empty tomb dares us to trust that the Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus

Therefore, the resurrection is more than just a suspension of natural law and whether you believe it happened

The resurrection is an invitation to life in a new reality; the Kingdom of God

In the Kingdom of God, we believe *life will always defeat death*, even amidst evidence to the contrary

And contrary evidence is the reality for the disciples during that very first Holy Week

We should not be too hard on the disciples for their hesitancy to accept the news of the resurrection

Their initial reaction was born from a place of fear and uncertainty

Even if they had wanted what the women said to be true, and why wouldn't they, even if they had moved beyond the incredulity of it all, one must ask if they were spiritually and emotionally able to consider that it could be true?

Remember, they were hiding in fear, their beloved Rabbi dead, their dreams and vision of life shattered

They can be shown mercy, I believe, for doubting what they heard

For we often do the same

Whether personal fears or health concerns, professional demands or broken relationships, dark nights of the soul or uncertainty about future days, the reality of lost life, lost dreams, and lost faith can be oppressively daunting

And when in these valleys of the shadow of death, in moments of desperation, sorrow, and fear, it can seem virtually impossible to consider any other possibility

Considering this then, the life giving message we receive from Luke today is that the story we are told doesn't end in uncertainty and pain, fear and the skepticism, shattered dreams and confusion

No, instead we get a simple sentence that is anything but meek ...

“But Peter got up and ran to the tomb”

Now, who knows if Peter thought the women's words were *leros* or not

We don't know if he went to the tomb out of faithfulness or to prove the women wrong

All we know is that in response to the mere possibility of resurrection, Peter ran to the tomb

In doing so, Peter models for all who seek to follow Jesus that uncertainty and hope, fear and trust, are what makes for a faithful response to the resurrection

Perhaps you are burdened by life right now and hope seems not only foreign but impossible

Perhaps you are struggling in faith, uncertain about God, and uncertain if you even want to have faith at all

Perhaps you are dealing with a health issue that has brought your life to a standstill

Or perhaps you are still reeling from the death of a loved one that continues to cause sleepless nights

In these and like moments, the promise of resurrection can seem as if it is not enough

Yet, it is enough. It is more than enough.

When Peter gazed into that empty tomb, he saw nothing less than the place where God's eternal kingdom collided with and conquered our broken and desperate world

When Peter stared into that empty tomb, he saw nothing less than the place where God's will for life defeats the world's offer of death

When Peter peered into that empty tomb, he saw nothing less than the place where the love and grace of Jesus reveals it cannot and will not be bound

And if Jesus is unbound, then everything God desires for this world – reconciliation, justice, peace, and love – is fully and completely on the table

So, like Peter, let us faithfully, if fearfully, run to the possibility of resurrection in our lives and for our world

For as we do so, I believe we will grow bold enough to proclaim the riskiest yet most wonderful words we will ever say ...

He is Risen ... He is Risen Indeed

Amen