

EASTER SUNDAY C

April 4, 2010

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Acts 10:34—43 Psalm 118:1—2, 14—24 1 Corinthians 15:19—26 ***Luke 24:1—12***

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!*

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Unbelievable, isn't it? It's a truly unbelievable story that someone could rise from the dead!

It was unbelievable to those women who went to Jesus' tomb that first Easter morning. Despite all that they had heard, all that they had witnessed while they walked with Jesus, they still didn't believe.

Early on that first day of the week, some women went to the tomb. They went, not because they were expecting to be witnesses to the miracle that Jesus had foretold, but because they had a solemn duty to perform. As Jesus' surrogate family on earth, they went to perform the ritual anointing of his body with spices in preparation for his final burial. They are seeking the dead – looking for a corpse. They fully expected to find his body there.

Luke tells us that when they got to the tomb they found the stone rolled away, went in, and did not find Jesus' body. Then Luke tells us they were “perplexed.” Well, of course they were perplexed!

Suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes – presumably angels – came and stood beside them. The women quickly moved from perplexed to terrified, and fell to the ground. The men said, “Why are you looking for the living Jesus in a cemetery? He is not here, but has risen.”

And what the men said next is very important: “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.” And Luke tells us, “THEN they REMEMBERED his words.” Following their remembrance, the women go forth, in belief, to tell the disciples what they have seen. The women move from unbelief to belief *because they remembered what Jesus had foretold.*

Suddenly, Jesus rising from the dead was believable BECAUSE of all that they had heard, all that they had witnessed, while they walked with Jesus. *Through remembrance comes belief.*

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What does it mean to “remember”? Part of it means to make some thoughts present. Words or events that happened in the past become part of one's life in the present. With the reminder from the “two men” about the words Jesus had said in the past, those words become part of the women's present lives.¹

¹ Brian Stoffregen, *Exegetical Notes – Luke 24:1–12*

Memory is a powerful thing. For instance, I want you to remember one of the most important times in your life. Go ahead, think of a day that was really important to you. Perhaps you're thinking of your wedding, the birth of a child, a significant family event. Or maybe you're thinking of the day man first walked on the moon, the day JFK was killed, or perhaps the events of 9/11.

Remembering is more than an intellectual exercise; it is a visceral experience. With remembrance, the events of that day all come rushing back: all the sights, sounds, and feelings associated with that day. If it was a bad memory, you might suddenly experience a rush of adrenalin as your body remembers a traumatic event. If it was a good memory, your brain might suddenly be flooded with feel-good endorphins, and you once again experience the emotional high of that event. Remembering often moves beyond the brain to being a whole-body experience. “This 'remembering' is more than just 'thinking about,' but 're-presenting' the historical event, so that we, in the present, are also participants.”²

And so it is as we remember the events of that first Easter morning. Remembering the witness of those women at the tomb, Easter is more than an intellectual exercise; it is acknowledging the reality of the living, bodied Christ in our midst.

² *Ibid.*

Just as Jesus rose from the dead and lived and walked among those disciples 2,000 years ago, so Jesus remains a bodily reality with us today. Every Sunday we come to church and remember his life-saving actions when we partake of the Lord's Supper, where Jesus is truly present with us in, with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

And yet, there are times in our lives when we find ourselves doubting the truth of the resurrection. After all, no one before or since Jesus has risen from the dead, never to die again. It is a story that truly is beyond logical belief. How often do we find ourselves saying, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”?³

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, used to advise his traveling preachers (who sometimes confessed to a certain weakness of faith), “Preach faith until you have it.” By that, I think that Wesley meant that it is important to keep reiterating the faith that we have until it becomes the faith we want. Of course, we don't “have” this faith. It's more accurate to say that this faith “has us.” But sometimes, when it comes to believing in Jesus, the first thing is just to believe that Christ desires our faith, that he will come to us and give us the faith we need, if we just stay.⁴

3 Mark 9:24

4 William Willimon, “Holding on to Easter,” Pulpit Resource, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, Inc., 2010), http://www.logosproductions.com/pr_online.php?action=view&site_uid1=9832&hallway_uid1=9834&catalog_uid1=1618&content_id=61906&_UserReference=154154EA78F2FA334BB7B009, downloaded 4/3/10.

This is what we do when we come to church every week. We remember Jesus. We remember his blameless life, the death he suffered on our behalf, and his life-giving resurrection from the dead. We rehearse, over and over again, the story of what he has done for us, to move from remembrance to belief. We rely on his promise to be with us always. We rely on the promise that through the bread and wine of Holy Communion Jesus does truly come to us, creating faith in the unbelieving heart.

Bishop William Willimon of the United Methodist Church remembers a certain lecture in seminary by an Orthodox priest. The priest lectured on the creeds of the church and their development. At the end of his lecture a student friend of Dr. Willimon's rose and asked, "But what do you do when you have trouble believing some part of the creed? What can you do when you, in integrity, cannot affirm the whole creed?" The priest replied simply, "You can keep saying it until you believe it. Give yourself some time; it will eventually come to you."⁵

And so, if you are here on this Easter morning still doubting that Jesus could have risen from the dead 2,000 years ago, you're in the right place. It is a truly unbelievable story. I propose to you that it's a story so unbelievable that it could only have been inspired by divine action.

⁵ *Ibid.*

It is that divine action that we remember day in and day out, week after week, and most especially, on this Easter morning. That God became human, was born as one of us, lived the blameless life that we cannot, and suffered the death that we deserve. And more than that, that he rose from the dead to live eternally, the first-fruits of all creation, so that we, too, may live with him for all eternity.

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Amen.

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