

## **“This Is THE Day”**

April 17, 2022

*Selah: Life in a Minor Key series*

Luke is my favorite Gospel because of how Luke describes the exchange of information, especially in the account of resurrection. Luke says that the disciples don't believe the women who come back from the tomb saying that Jesus' body is gone. One translation says, “they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them an idle tale.” Another translation says the news from the women seemed like nonsense – like gossip, babbling, nothing worth paying attention to. We're told that the men who were hiding out dismissed it, even though the women “kept saying” the news.

Even though these women had stayed with Jesus, even though they hadn't taken their eyes off of him when he was killed, even though they had witnessed everything, the Eleven and the rest don't believe them! But then again, I don't blame them. It's hard to believe. Jesus died, and the women were going there to prepare his body. What happened had taken them by surprise, too. There was silence, disbelief, confusion, and questions before they went back to tell anyone.

When we visited New Orleans over Spring Break, we took a cemetery tour, which is very interesting in New Orleans. One comment from our tour guide struck me as I was thinking about Holy Week. He said, “We bury our dead at eye level.” It occurred to me that's exactly what happened for those who were close to Jesus. They were right there when Jesus died. He wasn't “lifted high” from the ground, but was right in front of them. Everyone could see it.

These women had seen it. They had been there and watched it all. Now the women came with their spices to give Jesus' body a proper burial, he wasn't there. They were surprised, and so were the ones they told.

Those who followed Jesus experienced the range of emotions we've had this past week – from the pageantry of Jesus coming into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna!” to the intimacy of Jesus washing feet and sharing the Last Supper with them to the terror of his crucifixion. How hard it must have been for the women to hear that he had risen! And how hard for the others to believe them! Certainly, it would have been a time when “you had to be there.”

The women wanted to get to the tomb and prepare Jesus' body and perhaps see Jesus again, so no physical body was a problem. Not being able to find Jesus'

body and prepare it was a problem. And I'm sure they were dumbstruck when two men asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Apparently, the women were looking for Jesus in the wrong place – the tomb is empty. But it isn't an empty tomb that leads them to faith. They will meet the risen Christ personally. There will be no doubt that he is alive. When we look at all that happens after resurrection, it's clear that he is alive. They meet him face-to-face.

Simply hearing that the tomb is empty doesn't make us believe that Jesus is raised from the dead and that he lives. That's not what brings us here to worship today. We have to experience the risen Christ for ourselves, trust him, believe in him, and claim the new life he offers so freely for each of us.

The men at the tomb proclaim it: "He is not here; he has risen!" Resurrection isn't what anyone expected to happen. Remember that Jesus never meets our expectations, but always exceeds them. Sometimes it's hard for us to believe, too. The risen Christ meets people in unexpected places – even coming into a locked room and offering peace to those who had run away.

Still, we meet Jesus and encounter resurrection in places we'd never expect. I had a texting conversation with an old friend who reached out for prayer and shared her struggle and joy. She's on the journey of sobriety, and she shared the blessing of her growing trust in God. Those moments are precious and holy. I offered prayer for her and for all those whose prayers were offered at our prayer vigil.

Resurrection moments happen, and yet we want proof. We want to be able to prove it. But resurrection is more than that. It's claiming our faith. **MEDIA:** "This Is Resurrection."

Images of resurrection are all around us, and they're reminders of God's desire for new life for all of us. That's the thing about resurrection – we know it when we see it. We know it when we hear it. We know it when we experience it.

Psalms have helped us feel our faith - both the deepest pain and highest joy. Today is the day for celebration, hope, and renewal. Psalm 118 offers joy that's grounded in gratitude, and the psalmist calls us to thank God and praise God because of the new life God offers. If we read the whole psalm, the psalmist speaks of being saved from death, and we join that same celebration because that's the foundation of this day - THE day: God doesn't give us over to death, but upholds us and saves us - and then invites us to experience new life and claim the promise of eternal life.

We want to trust that God can bring new possibilities when we can't see them. We want to trust that God can do what is impossible - that God can bring joy where there is sorrow, potential where there is a problem, forgiveness where there's none, healing where there's sickness, relationship where there's disconnection. That's what the psalmist celebrates - that no matter challenges, sufferings, or struggles, we are upheld by God's love and grace.

The psalm starts with movement - entering into holy space, then giving thanks for God's faithfulness and merciful love, then testifying to God's presence and care, and rejoicing in God's salvation. It's a song to be sung - not just one time - but every day - as we celebrate deliverance from what holds us captive, deliverance that sets us free and transforms us.

The psalmist celebrates that death doesn't win. Hate doesn't win. Despair doesn't win. Life, love, and hope win the day - today and every day. And it's a gift we claim when we put our faith in the One who is risen. He is not in the tomb. Don't look for him there. He is alive!

Resurrection happened, and it changed everything. This isn't just about overcoming death; it's about what we do because death is overcome! What are the possibilities because of God's grace and love? Life wasn't the same after Jesus' resurrection. The disciples became powerful witnesses of faith. Their words invited thousands more to trust in Jesus. And we gather here today because of them and all who came after them and all who have helped us to follow Jesus.

The resurrection story happens in the present tense. He is not here. He is risen! Jesus is alive. The two men at the tomb tell the women, "Remember how he told you..." Remember what Jesus did and said. Remember the time you spent with him. Remember the miracles. Remember his teaching. Remember how he changed your life. Remember who he is - not who he was - who he is. And when they go back, Luke says that they keep saying the news they have. They are persistent and insistent on sharing it even in their confusion. I wonder if that's a word for us.

What the women experienced at the empty tomb was only a beginning of life lived with Jesus who is risen from the dead. And, friends, for you and me, Easter isn't an end to our faith. It's not the culmination; it's the beginning. It's the foundation. This isn't a one-day celebration, but a way that we live every day with joy, hope, and peace. This is the day that the Lord has made - today is THE day. Every day is THE day to rejoice and be glad.

Even as we hear the call to celebrate, we don't ignore the reality that hits us

hard today: personal stuff we carry, the news of continued death and violence in Ukraine and other places, the tragedy of another young man dead after a traffic stop, health concerns, the pain of grief and struggle, and so much that can make it difficult to celebrate and embrace resurrection.

Easter comes in the midst of a world that isn't all bright and wonderful, and that's precisely why it matters. We celebrate Jesus' resurrection, but maybe you struggle to believe that new life is really possible. And it's hard to believe - to believe that in the midst of so much death, despair, and suffering - that life and love have power to make a difference. But that's the Good News. The message that these women take away from that empty tomb was that love and light break through powerfully even when all seems lost.

Luke ends his account of resurrection with Peter running to the tomb, and then we get the story of two men on the road to Emmaus. They experience the risen Christ. When all seems lost, there's a promise of hope.

Luke is my favorite Gospel writer, and I love the psalmists, but soccer coach Ted Lasso is one of my favorite contemporary theologians. When I finally watched the series, I wrote down Ted Lasso's words from a scene when he was giving a locker room speech to his team. He says, "I've heard the phrase 'It's the hope that kills you.'" But then says that it's actually "the lack of hope" that destroys us. And then he says it plainly, "I believe in hope."

So today I'm with Gospel writer Luke, the psalmist who calls us to celebrate, also and Ted Lasso, who believes in hope. This is THE day to claim hope - that death isn't the end, that God is working in our lives to bring salvation, and that hope is real. Forgiveness is real. Redemption is real. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Everything is new; there is new life, and an opportunity for a new beginning for us and for all of creation.

Easter presents us again with our calling as redeemed people who are sent to share the grace of God with others. Easter is holy reversal of all that we expect. Jesus will never meet our expectations, but he will always exceed them. The stone rejected is the cornerstone - the most important part of the building. The One who was rejected and offered the greatest act of sacrificial love is the foundation of our faith - the risen Christ is the One we worship. We are here because of Jesus' resurrection. We claim and live into new life in Christ. Jesus' resurrection isn't an event locked in the vaults of history. It's as fresh and new and relevant for our lives today as it was when the women went to the tomb to prepare the body and didn't find it there.

If we sing like the psalmist, we share the Good News. If we keep on sharing what we've seen and heard - and what we know to be true about God - we testify to Good News. The church - the Body of Christ - is the presence of the risen Christ in the world. The Good News isn't an idle tale; it's not nonsense. It's the very word that offers hope, new life, and joy.

So however we come, God is here. If you're ready to shout "Alleluia!" then do it. If you can't rejoice or if you can't muster an "Alleluia!" then rest in the assurance that God is powerful, that God is real, that God is working, that God is healing, that God is loving you even now. Rest in the presence of God that is with you - and know that those stirrings of hope and peace in your soul are God working in you.

God's love is more powerful than the worst of what we experience in the world, and God loves us no matter what. God saves us. That's the song we sing today. Perhaps God is speaking to your heart today. Maybe you've been thinking about what it means to have a new beginning in Jesus Christ. God is calling each of us, as we hear the resurrection story, to trust in Jesus to overcome the worst - even death - with the promise of hope and new life. So, this is THE day - renew that commitment. If you want to make that commitment today, this is THE day.

So, let's try it again: Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!** This is the day that the Lord has made. **Let us rejoice and be glad in it!** Thanks be to God. AMEN.