

Remember

A Sermon Expositing Luke 24:1-12

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Do you think that's where we are right now?

Mary and Mary and Joanna and others with them approached the tomb the first day of the week with the spices and oils they would need to prepare the violently broken body of their beloved friend and teacher for burial. There is a lot in that worth unpacking. On this Easter Sunday that falls at such a time as we're living I find it particularly noteworthy that these women – followers of Jesus – were not despondent. Grieving, deeply in shock, traumatized? Yes, but despondent to the point of inaction, no. The men, at this stage of the story we're not sure about. Who could blame them really if they were off somewhere holed up in a barricaded room afraid and reeling from the traumatic loss of their loved one? Maybe the men are or maybe they're not utterly despondent, but make note friends, these women are not. They have important things to do. This is the particular nuance that brings the story of Jesus's resurrection to life for me this year.

These women have invested their lives in a person and in the ways that person taught. They have committed their trust and their hope in the one who was now in the grave. All they have hoped for, all they have longed for, whatever all that trust and investment was all about is now lying in the tomb. So yes, they have been crushed, and yes they are grieving so very deeply, and yes their whole lives have been shattered, but there is also stuff to be done. They are not despondent to the point of inaction. I wonder if that's where we are in the world today.

History seems to be playing on a loop. Have you noticed? I spent the first week after troops and tanks started pouring over the Ukrainian border wondering how it is possible that such an ego-fueled, naked power grab could be taking place on such a large geo-political scale in the year 2022. I've spent the six weeks since lamenting the loss of life and the terror and the violence levelled against a people and, like you I'm sure, feeling utterly helpless. Helpless, because I'm so far away, helpless because the power behind it all is so great, helpless because I know we've learned these lessons already. But while these feelings of helplessness have a new character and new faces and stories over which to be draped, the core of the feelings is not new. There are people much closer to where I am suffering indignity, hunger, violence, death – many simply because they are people of color, or women, or transgender, or abled in a way different than most, or because their heritage in this land older than that of Europeans. Those inequities and that indifference and that misery have been amplified by our struggle to cope with a pandemic that we now know will simply be our unwelcome companion in life. What I'm saying is, the stench of decay is all around us and in us and it is traumatizing, depressing, frightening, irritating; but I wonder if we find ourselves where the women on their way to the tomb were – that is grieving, but not despondent.

Like those women, we've got stuff to do! Collectively we're busy in all kinds of places and ways. Getting food items together for folks who need it, showing up in the times and places where people are raising their voices for changes to public policy, advocating for and providing for LGBTQ+ young people, addressing our own internalized narratives of supremacy, making meals for folks occupied by illness, sending support to

Note: Sermon manuscripts are written for the ear rather than the eye. If grammar or punctuation seem unconventional and the meaning unclear, try pronouncing the sentence aloud phonetically.

humanitarian crises, training up young ones to be kind and just in their ways, recycling and composting and trying to be a little more carbon neutral, there's a lot of stuff that needs doing and there's a lot of stuff we've set our hands to, but do you think we're like the women were that day? Doing the things that need doing – the good things, the important and necessary things, the things that make some difference in the world – but doing them all knowing all the while that our ultimate hope is over there already in the grave? Are we just applying some spices, are we just freshening up a body, are we just greeting the stench of death with a nice pot pourri?

I know the question I'm posing is an existential one. Is this world we're in, this creaturely existence we're living already doomed to ultimate failure? Was the writer of Ecclesiastes right? Is all vanity? Shall we just make what we can out of this existence then make peace with the fact that we're powerless against the forces of evil and death? Yes, it's existential, but I think we feel it in the practical places of our lives too don't we?

On the way to the office, 8:30am any old Tuesday, travel mug of coffee already halfway to lukewarm wondering, "Is this thing I'm doing with my life really doing anything? Providing for the family, sure, but is what I'm doing – is who I am really tipping the tide of the world at all?"

Mid afternoon, middle of the week, in the car with a kid or two or three. On the way to practice or rehearsal or club and wondering, "Are they getting it?" Are they filling up from the inside with the stuff they need to take care of themselves and others around them, but also are their lives rich and meaningful and joyful now? Will they be growing into a kinder, gentler, more equitable world or do we just need to protect them from it?

Some random day when an appointment was available to talk to a professional – an attorney about a will or a financial advisor about retirement or a representative of a home about housing and continuation of care or even a funeral director or a pastor about final wishes. "Is everything in order? Do I have enough to see me through? Will the kids have enough? Have I done enough? Is anything any different because I've been here? Or are we all just getting through our days?"

Is all of our coming and going adding up to something? Are we where the women were – doing the things that need doing all while knowing the fullness of our hope for ourselves and for the world is over there lying in the grave?

If we are, that might not be such a bad thing actually, because – remember.

"Remember."

That's the first word from those white clad messengers of God in our reading this morning after they announced that Christ is risen – "[DON'T YOU REMEMBER]," they say, "that he told you that the Son of Man had to be handed over to sinners and crucified!" Don't you remember that he told you this day would come? Don't you remember he told you it would all feel futile? Don't you remember he told you you'd have to grieve? Don't you remember he told you there would be suffering and there would be wondering if any of it even matters? Don't you remember he told you there would be *just going through the motions*, because you don't know what else to do? Don't you remember he told you that there would be "I don't know what to do now!?" Don't you remember he told you there would be evil so staggering, so blatant, so militant, so violent that to even *speak* a word of challenge against it would invite pain unimaginable? Don't you remember he told you on the third day...

Don't you remember?

Don't you remember that he told you that on the third day he'd get up again!?

The women were there ready to prepare a body for burial, but only because they had forgotten what he said. Have we forgotten?

I don't know that we've *forgotten* what he said. We have this day once a year to celebrate ^{what he told us and to say our Alleluias}. Yeah, see? That's what's happened. It's just like that. We gave you bells and told you to celebrate the fact that Christ arose on the third day by ringing them when you heard, "Alleluia." And that sounded like a good idea so you did it with your full force and might. And then we did it a few more times and that was fun. And then you know, it got to be kinda normalized, but we went through the motions anyway. Alleluia. Then for

a little while we didn't ring the bells, because we didn't proclaim, "alleluia" for a bit and we didn't forget so much as we were just out of practice. It caught us by surprise. We started talking about some serious stuff and jingling bells in the middle of all that seems maybe a bit silly? Like the sound of the bells just doesn't have much to offer in the midst of talk about the darkness in our world. We didn't really *forget* the bells so much as we assigned them to their place. The bells proclaim the resurrection of Christ and things like that don't have any place when things get real, do they?

But then...then a guy clad in white said, "remember!?" And the bells came back! Alleluia!?

That's just the way the life of faith works. We know, we proclaim that we are a people of resurrection, but of course there's little evidence of resurrection in the world. In time things get real. The decay of things catches our attention, the violence of the world stuns us – not into complete stillness mind you – we're still doing the good things, still staying busy with serving and learning and growing and giving off as much goodness as we can, but the full reality of what we're doing kind of finds its way to the background and before long somewhere within us we're no longer on our way to witness resurrection, we're just on our way to dressing a body.

Those two things can sometimes look a lot the same you know; dressing a body and witnessing resurrection. But they *aren't* the same. One is to step into a world knowing it will defeat you, which is brave, but unsustainable. The other is to know that only death will suffer defeat, which is final. One is to watch the news and shake one's head saying, "things will never change." The other is to go out and put a little change in the news. One is to greet the suffering in the world with random acts of do gooderism. The other is to commit oneself fully and permanently to just outcomes and equitable experience for all.

Remember, he said there would be struggle and fear and violence and pain, but on the third day he would get up. Remember, the resurrection of Christ has never been about a guy waking up from a three day nap 2000 years ago, but about the power of God to put back together what is broken, to restore what is lost, to give life to what has died. Remember, the resurrection of Christ may be behind us, but it still lies before us. Remember, we're not just going through the motions here, we're participating in resurrection. Remember, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

Alleluia!