

“GOD MOVES... OUT OF THE TOMB”

Rev. Victor Kim

Luke 24:1-12

(04-17-22) Easter

Today is the finale of our Lent series of sermons around God moves...Last Sunday we mourned as God moved to the cross but this morning on Easter we celebrate as God moves out of the tomb. Thank you for journeying through this season of Lent and I trust that you also have moved in faith, in repentance, in trust and in hope.

A bank in Binghamton, New York, had some flowers sent to a competitor who had recently expanded their business into a new building. There was a mix-up at the flower shop and the card sent with the arrangement read, “With our deepest sympathy.” The florist, who was greatly embarrassed, said he couldn’t imagine how this mix-up happened, and he apologized. It was halfway through the day before he sat up with a horrified look on his face, realizing that at some funeral somebody was opening a note that read, **“Congratulations on your new location!”**

Luke’s Easter account begins like all the other gospels, with women going to the tomb early on the first day of the week, to anoint the body of Jesus their friend and master who had been put to death on the cross only three days earlier. No doubt their emotions would have been funereal, consistent with the sentiment of “with our deepest sympathy.” A promising young life had been snuffed out so brutally. Someone they had loved, had such high hopes for, someone they had believed to be the Messiah, had died like a criminal, hung on the cross in public for all to see. **With our deepest sympathy indeed.**

So they did what they could do, what they knew how to do. **But they had no idea what awaited them that first Easter morning. The women go expecting a dead Jesus, not an empty tomb.** But the stone was rolled away, and the tomb was indeed empty. Suddenly two men, angels, stood beside them. They said to the terrified women, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.”** He’s in a new location! Remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again. Then the women remembered, and they returned and told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

The role of the women is emphasized in Luke’s account of the resurrection even more than the other gospels. The women have supported Jesus throughout his ministry. They are there to watch Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. They witness his burial. **But they are not believed by the apostles.** It’s ironic that Luke uses the term apostle here to describe those who had been called to this point disciples. The word apostle in the Greek literally means, one who is sent off, an emissary, someone who conveys a message. But here the message is conveyed by the women and the apostles don’t believe it! They thought it to be an idle tale. These days we’d use different words than idle tale. Garbage, drivel, nonsense, and other words that start with the letters B and S.¹

Well, I suppose we wouldn’t have believed them either. Why would we? Who among us has ever gone to a funeral with any other expectation than that the dead remain dead? **The dead don’t rise. If they did, if the dead don’t stay dead, what could you depend on? If even the finality of death wasn’t final, then what is?** No wonder the disciples didn’t believe the women’s account.

¹ Anna Carter Florence, *Working Preacher*, June 2, 2008

But you know what, that account is so central to the resurrection story. The great preacher and teacher Fred Craddock says **that matters of faith are never finally *proven*, nor faith generated by an incontrovertible argument. Faith is communicated by witness, but that witness is not reduced to how believers have felt about their experiences of Jesus Christ.**" Faith is communicated by witness. None of the gospel accounts has any description of the actual resurrection of Jesus. There's no biological detailing of how a dead body comes back to life. There's no medical explanation offered, not even a pre-scientific account of how life returns to a corpse. **All the women are told is that Jesus has risen.**

And they tell go and tell the others. **Testimony. Proclamation.** It's as central to Easter as the resurrection itself. What the women see, they tell the apostles. While they don't believe at first, one of them, Peter, goes and takes a look for himself. The gospel says that he went home, amazed at what had happened. We need to understand that the word translated as "**amazed**" is closer to "**wondering**." So Peter went home wondering what had happened. How could he not? He wonders how it is that the body is missing and the cloths are left by themselves. He wonders whether what the women told him was true. He wonders.

Eventually, he and the others experience the risen Christ themselves. And they too tell others, they proclaim the risen Christ, they share their testimony. **And that's how it goes, that's how faith is spread, that's how the story of resurrection is shared.** But their witness isn't only about what they **felt** about their experiences. Their witness becomes **grounded in their actions**, in their commitment to the living Christ and to the kingdom that their Lord and Master had taught and embodied while in their midst.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury describes it this way: **the believer's life is a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus: he or she demonstrates that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement—a pattern, a dance, intelligible as a pattern only when its pivot and heart become manifest. The believer shows Jesus as the center of his or her life.**² In order to live such a life we have to stop looking for the living among the dead. We don't find Jesus in the dead traditions to which we become too accustomed. We come to church on Easter Sunday, to hear beautiful music, to listen to a good sermon, to enjoy the fellowship of other Christians, **but if we think that this is the place where we'll find the resurrected Jesus, we're missing the point. Jesus has moved to a new location. He is not here, but has risen.**

He's risen and he's out and about. He will not be contained by any church, any building, any human dogma or doctrine, any of our expectations. Why not respect him as a great teacher and rabbi and model, a sage, a prophet, a wise man? **But that just keeps him as dead as every other great human being. Inspiring but dead, with no power to redeem or save.** Why is that so necessary, why redeem, why save, save from what? Throughout his ministry Jesus encountered profound brokenness in the world and went about reversing that brokenness. Where Jesus found sin and death, he brought forgiveness and resurrection. **That's the essential message of the gospel, the Christian faith. God is always in the business of stopping evil, bringing wholeness, and defying death. We are saved because the tomb cannot stop Jesus. Just when evil things they've stopped him, he's on to a new location! He is not here, but has risen!**

When the early Christians spoke about their faith in Jesus, they shared in their confession that he had risen from the dead, that he had been resurrected. But they knew that those who had never experienced the risen Christ with their own eyes would never believe words alone. So when the early Christians gave their testimony, when they proclaimed their faith, **that testimony, that proclamation, was always grounded in**

² Jim Friedrich, *The Christian Century*, April 3, 2019

their living. This Jesus they proclaimed, this Christ they testified to, became the center of their life and that life was lived with generosity for the needy, compassion for the hurting, healing for the sick, mercy for the sinners, love for their enemies, sacrifice for one another.

The question for us this Easter morning is what testimony will we share about the risen Jesus? This is my last Easter with you as minister of Richmond Presbyterian Church. The question I want to ask is, **what will RPC proclaim to the world about the risen Christ?** I want to encourage you to not only invite people in so that they might hear the words of proclamation, **but to go out, to live in this community and in this world, where your life together will be a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus, where how you serve and how you sacrifice, where your compassion and your mercy, where your hunger for justice and peace-making, where the wideness of your welcome and the genuineness of your love will proclaim the pattern of your life, that the risen Jesus is at the heart of this congregation, of this people.**

Let me encourage you with the example of Peter. Peter goes and takes a look, but he's not sure, not at first. He goes home and wonders. We see that not all resurrection stories are instantaneous miracles. In fact, for most of us, it's a long process of coming to realize that God's love and promises have been there—true all along. So be kind to yourselves when you struggle, when you find it difficult, when you fail and when you fear that you don't have what it takes. God is patient and God is love.

And remember also that when the women first proclaimed what they had seen, when they testified to what had happened to them, only one of the apostles, only Peter thought enough to at least go and take a look. **One out of eleven, that's a 9% success rate.** Over 90% of the people to whom we proclaim and testify, even with our lives as with our words, will dismiss the good news as garbage, drivel, nonsense or worse. **But 9% is pretty good, especially given how much our churches struggle with evangelism. Any church worth its salt would take 9%! And what's more, if we don't testify, if we don't proclaim, it won't even be 9%, it will be nothing.**³

So may we continue to look for Jesus among the living, not the dead. May we know that he is not dead, consigned to places where we can control him and contain him, but that God has moved out of the tomb, that Jesus is risen, that he is alive and he goes ahead of us. **And may we proclaim and testify to the one who alone can save and redeem and transform lives, my life, your life, the life of this world. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!**

Thanks be to God!

³ *Pulpit Fiction* Podcast, April 17, 2022