

Easter Day
April 17, 2022
Southampton, MA

Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

The first Easter account is the most significant Jesus story. Rising from the dead after three days in the tomb proved his divinity. Yet, the four gospel writers wrote different Resurrection stories. None reconciled with each other. Seeing Jesus differently, each gospel writer presented him in a particular light, which accounts for the variations between the same Jesus stories throughout the gospels.

Luke's account of the first Easter morning resembled Mark's. Whereas Matthew's and John's accounts included Jesus' appearance, these two did not. However, as similar as the Markan and Lukan accounts were, they differed in two respects. First, Mark had only one man tell the women that Jesus was gone. Second, Mark wrote that the women were afraid and said nothing.

In Luke, the women, which included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, reported what they had witnessed to the eleven, who thought it was an idle tale. Peter took it upon himself to verify what they said. He went to the tomb and saw the burial cloths and returned home amazed.

Using three seemingly minor details, Luke's account of that morning was a portal to another story that commenced fifty days later. One detail was the two men in dazzling clothes who asked the women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (24:5b). Another was his reference to the disciples as "apostles." The third was the men thinking the women told an idle tale.

The two men at the tomb was a parallel to the two men in white robes in Acts 1, who said upon Jesus' ascension, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11a) The men at the tomb and the men at the ascension tied the two narratives together. The Greek verb *apostolos* which means to send, became apostle as a noun. Calling the disciples "apostles" pointed to their role as the gospel's messengers. Luke was the only one of the four gospel writers who made that reference. Luke further emphasized them as messengers in his second book, the account of the church's formation, which we know as Acts, but formally known as Acts of the Apostles. Finally, the idle tale that the apostles didn't believe became a dominant theme in Acts when the religious authorities repeatedly did not believe Peter, who preached that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

In other words, Luke's Easter story was a transition from Jesus' ministry to a movement of Jesus followers to the formation of the early church to separating from Judaism to becoming Christian. It was also a transition from its beginnings in Galilee to its spread across the Mediterranean Basin through Paul's three missionary journeys.

Luke's resurrection story linked the angel's proclamation at his birth, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on *earth* peace among those whom he favors," (2:14) to the formation of the church. Implicitly, Luke made his resurrection account an opening call to discipleship, to continue the work and ministry that Jesus began in Galilee. Ultimately, though the Resurrection changed the course of history and reshaped moral philosophy, it would not have happened without the disciples continuing the work Jesus began.

God came to dwell among us as Jesus to teach us a way to live so we might have true peace and justice built upon a foundation of radically, inclusive love. Fear drove the decision to crucify Jesus. That fear came from losing power and authority. That fear came from a feeling of

scarcity. That fear came because that was the way the Roman Empire maintained its peace. Though fear nailed him to a cross, love was his liberation. As Jesus said the night before he died, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

He died in love for us. His death is our salvation, not just after we die, but in this world. His death dramatically galvanized the world’s attention to a way of life that was not sustainable. We cannot maintain peace through oppression and threats of violence. Peace maintained in fear requires increasingly more fear, however it is done, even executing an innocent man to maintain it. Love, however, which is inexhaustible, is the way to true peace, which is the wholeness of life, shalom. As one of my seminary professors often reminded us, “Jesus loved us into freedom.” Jesus’ death and resurrection freed us so we can have eternal life, which begins in this world when we have true peace. Resurrection frees us from the ways of death to embrace the ways of life.

The women’s idle tale was replayed several times throughout Acts. Despite the demonstrated power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fifty days later and Peter’s boldly dramatic speech, he and others made speeches long after that morning to proclaim resurrection’s power and Jesus as the Messiah. Though many believed, skeptics remained. Even at the end of Acts after Paul arrived in Rome, the Resurrection remained an idle tale to many people. Luke wrote of a meeting Paul had with many Jews after arriving in Rome in which he testified to the Resurrection “both from the law of Moses and from the prophets,” (Acts 28:23b) some believed, and some didn’t. Paul quoted Isaiah, “Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.” (Acts 28:26)

The Resurrection is a fantastic story. It’s hard to believe and even harder to grasp its implications for today. Yet, when a devastatingly destructive war continues in Ukraine, national

politics is so toxic that Congress cannot name a Florida courthouse for the first Black federal judge in the deep South¹, too many people are one illness away from crippling debt, climate change unchecked will alter life as we know it, and there are plenty of other issues, this idle tale is a path forward, if we're willing to listen. This idle tale says that even following the darkest and deepest despair, Good Friday, there is life after death, Easter.

Furthermore, even if the idea that a dead man can come back to life is too strange to accept, the wisdom in Jesus' teachings cannot be dismissed. How does one argue against love's transforming power? How does one argue against the proposition that everyone deserves human dignity regardless of their race, ethnicity, age, physical and mental capability, gender, sexual identity, immigration status, or economic circumstances? How does one argue that in the richest nation in the history of the world we don't enough for everyone to have their daily bread? How does one argue against the belief that our collective security is greater when we sustain the common good? How does one argue against the proposition that everyone wants to be loved into freedom?

We, the church, are stewards of this idle tale. Luke's account of that Easter morning opened to the Jesus followers Resurrection's consequences and its implications for themselves. The story beginning with the women, continuing through Peter and the other disciples, carried across the Mediterranean by Paul must be told. As the body of Christ today, we have inherited this responsibility. We must continue to tell this story, which we can do through words and deeds. Especially our deeds because through our deeds, we proclaim that Christ is alive.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

¹ Annie Karni, House *G.O.P.*, *Banding Together, Kills Bid to Honor Pioneering Black Judge*. **The New York Times**. April 14, 2022. Print April 13, Page A24. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/12/us/politics/gop-joseph-hatchett-florida.html>