

Easter Sunday April 21 2019

Acts 10:34-43 Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, friends, family, all those who are visiting us today. It is good that we are here.

I have seen witnesses to the resurrection. Those who have encountered the empty tomb and who live their lives in that promise that the grave is not the end. I have stood at the bedside of a woman with a body that is failing who has not one iota of fear of death because she has met the risen Jesus. Who knows that she will be with her Lord and with her family when that body finally gives out.

I have seen that witness in my Nana. My mother's mother. A woman who even into her nineties had a clear sense of God's call in her life. But, when her eyesight failed and her hearing was going began to wonder aloud why the train to glory land had not stopped for her yet. Who was ready for that trip because she knew the truth of the resurrection of Jesus that death does not win.

I have witnessed the risen Jesus. In the lives I have seen transformed by their encounter with him. The single mother of a special needs boy who always walked to communion face lifted with a smile of pure joy. The young man, whose life had been going sideways until the moment

of his epiphany, an encounter much like Paul's on the road to Damascus. Who in that encounter with Christ was given the means by which his life was transformed.

I have experienced the presence of the risen Jesus. Gathered in prayer with my brothers and sisters in Christ on a youth choir trip, at the funeral of my Nana, in the embrace of the organ blowing the rooftop off the building on Easter morning, in acoustic guitar around a campfire. In a sense of union with these others who were present with me that I cannot explain.

There may be some here who believe these to be idle tales. Utter nonsense. And I'd not really blame you. Much like the eleven and the rest of the disciples on that Easter morning it is an incredible tale. One that does not meet our expectations. Dead people aren't raised. Death is the end. Everyone knows this.

But I have seen the truth of these tales...and so have many of you.

Perhaps, like Peter, you have denied Jesus and this story. But now, something stirs in you. Enough to come and see for yourself. To bend down and look inside the tomb. To see just the empty grave cloths. No body. And to leave...amazed at what has happened even if you can't quite figure out what it is that has happened.

It is good that we are here, for whatever reason. Some of us come because we have seen the risen Jesus ourselves, some because it is our family members and friends who have done so. Some may come out of curiosity or because this is the shortest way to Grandma's Easter Dinner Table. But for whatever reason you come, listen to the witness before you.

You know the story of this day, or at least some of it.

Jesus, crucified, dead on Friday. Laid in a tomb. The women, coming on the first day of the week, coming to honor him by anointing the body. Coming to the tomb, maybe telling stories of Jesus. They find the stone rolled away and the body...gone. They are perplexed...at a loss... not sure what to do with this information. Tombs have bodies! Kind of like my GPS sometimes...re-calculating.

Then, the two men dressed in the dazzling clothes of heavenly beings. I have to admit, as a child of the 70's I tend to picture them in white leisure suits with a disco ball sparkling on them.

They chide the women gently... why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. Jesus is risen. Don't you remember what he told you?

And these faithful women think back over all that Jesus has taught them and then... a blossoming, an unfolding of understanding in their minds that is not fully explained... but something happens. And they leave, hurrying back to the other disciples to bear witness to all this. To tell them everything.

A witness that is received...less than enthusiastically. Except by Peter. Who also goes. No not just goes but runs, with maximum effort ,to see. See for himself. And who in his own encounter with the empty tomb has a different reaction...amazement at what has come into being. Even though what it is that he believes has come into being is not explained.

We are here, in this room, receiving this witness. From those who have seen the risen lord. A witness that has been passed down from parent to child, from one baptized brother or sister to another, believer to stranger for almost 2000 years. A witness that has sustained people I know, people you know, in the most difficult of times.

A witness, that can seem like an idle tale. Utter nonsense. One that often leaves us perplexed. Not quite able to put it all together. Or amazed at what has come into being through it.

According to our Gospel this morning. All of these are options for the faithful. The eleven and Peter, will have their own encounter of the

risen Jesus next week. At least two of the other disciples will encounter the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Will recognize him in the breaking of the bread and remember how their hearts burned within them as Jesus explained the scriptures. The reaction of each of those in this story; dismissal as an idle tale, running to the tomb, remembering what Jesus had said, all ultimately led them to believe. To their own encounter with the risen Jesus.

Peter, denier, sprinter to the tomb, the one who is amazed, will go on to found the church of Jesus Christ. To boldly proclaim, on that Pentecost morning so that thousands encounter the risen Christ, even in the house of Cornelius, Gentile and Roman officer, proclaim all that he has witnessed and all that Jesus has taught. Proclaim what he knows. Because that is what Jesus has called believers to do.

So, here is my witness. What I know.

In Jesus Christ, I know the truth of scripture. The truth of a God who has created me, you, and all that exists. Who has loved that creation from the beginning. Yet, our own willfulness, our desire to be god, to know what God knows has sundered a relationship with God that once was so close God walked through the garden in the warm evening breeze. This willfulness has separated us from God and that life close by him. And in that distance we live a life in which there is sin, death,

and suffering. The story of scripture is of God's pursuit of God's people. Like the Father running to the prodigal son. A constant reaching out to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Moses. Through prophets and kings. Through shepherds and servants. To bring about in this creation the kingdom that God wanted in the first place. To restore this relationship with us, his beloved.

Jesus is that reaching out. The God who loves us so much that God became one of us, so that we might no longer have to live under the power of sin, death, and suffering, but might live again in God's Kingdom. Jesus, is the embodiment of God's desire for us. Loving one another selflessly. Caring for those who have less, who have no family, who are on the margins of society. Seeing each other as what we are- created in the image of God and worthy of love and respect for that if nothing else.

When we trust this message of love, forgiveness, and grace in Jesus Christ then our lives are nothing like they were before. There are many here who can witness to that. I have seen it. Their lives are fuller and more abundant. These are lives that are lived with grace and mercy. Not necessarily lives lived without trials. We know that too. For we still live in the consequence of the sin let loose in the world. But they are ones that are lived always with the promise that we are God's beloved

and nothing, not height nor depth, nor things past, nor things to come nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Jesus Christ. And that means that death does not have the last word. In Christ we have a God who reaches down into all the graves we dig for ourselves and pulls us out...in ways both big and small.

And we gather, each Sunday, on the first day of the week to tell this idle tale again and again. To be amazed and perplexed. To ponder anew what this might mean for us. To remember what Jesus has taught us, what he said about loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us. What he showed us in loving one another selflessly. To eat the meal he shared with his disciples on that Maundy Thursday so long ago. The meal in which we too meet the risen Christ.

And then we go, each week to proclaim that good news, to bear witness; in word and deed to everyone we meet. Not in complete understanding, it is after all still a silly tale, but with utter confidence that this is so. Because of the witness of believers- like my Nana. Like Peter and Paul, Like those first witnesses without whom we would not have this proclamation- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and all the women. Because of the witness of believers like you and like me. Who are bold enough to go out into the world and proclaim...

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