

Where's the Evidence?

Easter Sunday

Luke 24: 1-12

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Well, here we are. God’s Easter people. Gathering around the same old story we have heard many times. The sorrow of the women who rise up early on Sunday morning to minister to Jesus’ body. The surprise of the ginormous two-ton stone that is rolled away. The startle of the angels that dazzle in white asking, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” It’s the story. Except, there is a problem: In all four gospels we do not get a witness to what happens to Jesus in the tomb. There is no YouTube video to watch; no fingerprints to examine. Resurrection is a closed-door moment between God and Jesus. Did God breathe into his dry bones saying, “Let these bones live?” Did God wave a hand over the body, like a magician performing a levitation trick saying, “Abracadabra, death be gone!?” We don’t know. We gather today around the unsolved mystery, without any hardcore evidence.

It’s probably why the disciples have the reaction they do when the women come back from the tomb. The women preach the first resurrection sermon, “Good news, Jesus is risen!” And what do the disciples say? “Yeah right...that’s an idle tale?” In the Greek what the disciples’ actually say is not appropriate for Christian ears. The Greek word is *lēros*. Translators try to curb the tone by labeling it an “idle tale” or “nonsense” or even “rubbish.” But in the Greek, it’s similar to a word father used when he’d stub his toe. The disciples are saying, “You’re full of *lēros*!” (The nice thing about speaking an ancient language, is you can still use the curse words and not get into any trouble.) “Your full of *lēros*.” We’d probably say the same thing, if someone came to us claiming God performed a resurrection miracle.

One day I was channel surfing when I came upon a broadcast of a popular T.V. evangelist. There he is on stage with his slicked back hair and bleached smile. Eventually, he looks into the camera and says, “Today God wants to perform a miracle in your life. If you need healing God wants to heal you! If you need provisions God wants to bless you! If you are feeling low, God wants to raise you up in glory!” He kept going: “Even Jesus himself had his setbacks. But after

three days, God lifted him up and today God wants to do the same for you.” Then the other shoe dropped: “But...you need to step out in faith first. All you need to do is write a check to the address below and if God doesn’t answer your prayer, we will give you every penny back!” Well, I verbally blurted out loud, “Well, that’s a bunch of *léros*!” It is of my opinion that God isn’t going to heal someone who sends in a check to some guy on television with a spray tan. But, then again, who has heard of someone being raised the dead. The woman tell the disciples what happened and their reaction makes sense: “Well, that’s a bunch a *léros*.”

But here’s the thing: do you remember how Peter responds? He runs to the tomb to see it for himself. It’s true for us too, isn’t it? We hear the Easter news and it’s hard to believe until we experience it for ourselves. Some of us grew up going to church. Our parents would drag us on Easter morning in our new spring outfits. We’d hear the preacher exclaim, “He is risen!” and the choir would ring bells. If you were lucky you had a trumpet. And most of us probably didn’t quite understand what all the hubbub was about until we experienced a resurrection moment for ourselves. Do you remember such a moment?

Now, I don’t mean for us to get stuck on this, but some of you may not know that when Joy was five-years old, her birth mother died from brain cancer. When she was in her last weeks, she had a dream. Her and some high school friends were exploring a house under construction, running from room to room. Suddenly the floor fell away beneath their feet and all her friends tumbled into space. Only she did not fall. There were two arms holding her secure that wouldn’t let her go. The vision sustained her until the end; it assured her that there is a force in the world that is stronger than death. Many people could have told her, “God will catch you.” Many preachers could say, “Just believe.” But often we need to experience these things for ourselves before we can believe it is true. Do you have a memory? If you do, hold onto it, allow it to sustain you.

You see, I don’t think our job is to convince people that Jesus is raised. Our job is to simply point to the empty tomb and then let them experience what comes next for themselves. There was a gentleman who had been working the steps in A.A. for years. He was talking to a minister confessing that he had done many things he was ashamed of in his life. So many, in fact, that he refused to believe that there was a Higher Power that cared about him enough to forgive him. Even though plenty of people tried to convince him that God forgives, his response was, “That’s *léros*.” The minister, aware that forgiveness was an important step to recovery asked, “So what has kept you sober all these years?” Then he launched into a story about how he almost slipped back into drinking once. He was going through some things, so he went to the ABC Store, picked out some cheap whiskey. He got into line, handed the clerk some cash. Except, the clerk looked him straight in the eyes and asked him, “Are you sure this is what you need?” He said, “Now I can’t explain it. I’ve never seen the guy before, but every time I want a drink, I remember that story.” The minister just listened and then pointed out: “Wow, it sounds to me like God really loves you.” You know, I don’t think people need to be told what to believe. Maybe all they really need is someone to listen to their stories and point to the presence of the living Lord that has been there the whole time.

Like on the news the other day, some of you may have watched Notre Dame *de Paris* burning. But faintly in the background you could hear the sound of people gathered in the street singing hymns. It's the presence of resurrection hoping that from the ashes God can still create something new.

Or on our southern border, we see resurrection people day in and day out, go into the heat dropping off coolers of food and jugs of water for traveling migrants. "The deserts will gush forth with springs," says God's resurrection promise. It's the presence of the living Lord.

Or a simple church in Winston Salem who is not afraid to lift up people of color by saying, "Black Lives Matter;" doesn't flinch at embracing every human being; and who dares to believe with their lives and love that there really is a force in this world stronger than death.

It turns out all the resurrection evidence that is needed is you. Right here exists the presence of the living Lord. But chances are, you aren't going to believe me. At least not until you've experienced it for yourself.