

“Idle Tale or Amazing Truth?”

Luke 24:1-12

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It's wonderful to gather together today on this highest holy day of the Christian year. However, even with Easter's great distinction, I'm enough of a realist to know that this weekend probably more interest has been on the final four basketball tournament, some might even say Butler's playing tomorrow night is miraculous. In our postmodern scientific era, miracles are hard for us to believe and there's no doubt that the resurrection of Jesus is a miracle that is hard to understand. Each of the gospel writers gives us a different perspective on this miracle, but Luke's account is the one we can directly relate to because it's most like us.

Unlike the other gospels, in Luke's account, the women do not have an encounter with the Risen Christ on that first Easter morning. Instead they are told that Jesus has risen from the dead. Two men in dazzling white clothes, [Luke doesn't call them angels] say, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” [24:5]. We can relate, can't we? This is like our Easter experiences, we have a message about the resurrection, we are told that it happened, but we have a hard time believing it in face of the facts...dead is dead. The women from that first Easter morning met with skepticism too. When the women went and told the disciples of the empty tomb, Luke's gospel tells us that the disciples thought it was an “idle tale,” the Greek word used here actually means “nonsense.” Even Peter, who goes to the tomb to check it out, is said to have been amazed, some translate that Greek word as “wonder” at the empty tomb, but the gospel does not say he believed. Isn't that like us too? We come to church on Easter, to check it out, some of us may be amazed, maybe believing, maybe not, some of us may be just wondering, can it be true and others are wondering, what if it is true?

This year from a conversation Bill King and I had about Lazarus coming back to life, I had a new insight. I know, a guest preacher gave a sermon on Lazarus a couple of weeks ago, but this is different. I think Jesus gave us a clue on how to face our unbelief about his resurrection in the rising of Lazarus from the dead. In the rising of Lazarus, Jesus was actually teaching us, preparing us, how to face the mystery of his resurrection. You remember the story. Jesus' friends' Mary and Martha brother, Lazarus, was dying. They sent for Jesus. Jesus took his time in getting there. Before Jesus gets there, Lazarus dies. Martha challenges Jesus on his delay. Jesus gives her those familiar, powerful words, “I am the resurrection and the life” [John 11:25]. She responds, my paraphrase “yes but, my brother is dead.” They go to the tomb of Lazarus and Jesus says, “Take away the stone.” Martha still having trouble believing says, again my paraphrase, “Jesus, are you sure? He's been dead four days. Dead is dead. He will already be starting to smell.” Jesus responds, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God!” Then Jesus prays. God did the work! Lazarus walks out of the tomb, hands and feet still bound in strips of cloth...then Jesus says, to those around him...“Unbind him, and let him go!”

This is it! This is the clue! “Unbind him and let him go.” Let's take that and put it in the context of Jesus' resurrection. We know Jesus prayed; in the Garden and on the Cross. God did the work! In the mysterious darkness of a cave...light and love came in power, the stone was rolled away, and the tomb once filled with the Beloved of God was empty! Women come to the tomb at the dawn of that first Easter day, they see it for what is, but don't find what their looking for. They go and tell the disciples, who think it's an idle tale: who don't believe that it is the amazing truth. They haven't a clue what to do. One goes to the tomb; the others sit around

scared and confused. They don't remember what Jesus told them at the rising of Lazarus, they don't remember what Jesus told them to do in the face of resurrection: "unbind him, and let him go!"

That's what we are to do! We are to unbind, unwrap the mystery of the resurrection! Jesus did his part. God did God's part...we are to do our part! For centuries Bible scholars, theologians and historians have tried to unwrap and unbind the resurrected One through debates and arguments; what is was; what it wasn't, what it means; what it doesn't: their "unwrapping" may or may not be interesting to us, but our unbinding/unwrapping the mystery of the resurrected One here together this morning is our Easter encounter with the Risen Christ! Like those first disciples, we may be confused. We might not know what we think or how feel about the resurrection. We might be scared as we face the mystery of the resurrection. We might think it's just a religious "idle tale." We know we can't prove scientifically beyond a reasonable doubt that the resurrection happened! But Jesus, through the rising of Lazarus told us how to go about living with our doubts and our questions about his resurrection, we are to "unbind him...and let him go!" Together we are to unwrap the mystery: dead is dead but perhaps death isn't final! Together we are to unbind the mystery, perhaps the resurrection isn't about the past but about the future, our future to live in the resurrection hope and power as a community of faith, instruments of resurrection life to the world we live in. The life Jesus proclaimed first to Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Together we are to unbind the mystery, unwrap the resurrected Christ from our concrete thinking; he's been dead three days or 2000 thousand years to the powerful possibilities of letting the living Christ be free among us!

On that first Easter morning, the two men in the tomb said to the women, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" A question for us may be, "why are we looking for the dead among the living?" "Unbind him and let him go!" We don't have all the answers, but Jesus' words to Martha are words to us as well, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" The Easter morning story in Luke doesn't end with belief, it ends with Peter's amazement...perhaps that's where we are...but the Easter story doesn't end...it continues today and into the future, as we "Easter people," together, unbind the mystery of Christ's resurrection for us and for the world that God so loves! It's an amazing truth...Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen!