

**Easter Meditation**  
**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Luke 24:1-12 Bill Chadwick**  
**Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017**

**Luke 24:1-12 *The Message* Looking for the Living One in a Cemetery**

24<sup>1-3</sup> *At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of Jesus.* <sup>4-8</sup> *They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?" Then they remembered Jesus' words.*

<sup>9-11</sup> *They left the tomb and broke the news of all this to the Eleven and the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them kept telling these things to the apostles, but the apostles didn't believe a word of it, thought they were making it all up.*<sup>12</sup> *But Peter jumped to his feet and ran to the tomb. He stooped to look in and saw a few grave clothes, that's all. He walked away puzzled, shaking his head.*

A few years ago I was about to begin Easter worship in the little chapel at Castle Ridge Care Center in Eden Prairie where I was the chaplain. About 16-17 residents were gathered, all in the last days of their lives, most deep into dementia. I began with a loud declaration: "It's Easter!"

A little woman in the first row of wheelchairs, hunched over, eyes down, suddenly sat up and said, "It's Easter?"

"Yes."

"Yay!" she shouted, raising her hands in the air!

I had nothin' left to say or do. "It's Easter! Yay!"

Any preacher will tell you that Easter is the most difficult sermon to prepare. What words are adequate in the face of the greatest event in history? At least the church in its wisdom has given us not just one day to observe Easter, but a season of fifty days, the liturgical season of Eastertide, in which to celebrate God's incredible gift of Resurrection.

*Mark was three years old when his pet lizard died. Since it was her grandson's first brush with death, Grandma suggested that Mark and his older brother hold a "funeral" for the lizard.*

*Grandma explained what a funeral was: a ceremony where you say a prayer, sing a song, and bury your loved one.*

*Grandma provided a shoe box and a burial place in the backyard. The boys thought it was a great idea, so they all proceeded to the backyard. Taking the lead, the older boy said a little prayer. Then he turned and asked little Mark if he wouldn't like to sing a song. With tears in his eyes, Mark clasped his hands, bowed his head, and belted out "Hit the Road, Jack! Don't you come back no more, no more. Hit the road, Jack, don't you come back no more."*

*That's exactly what Pilate, Herod..., Caiaphas, ... and everyone else who had plotted the death of Jesus were singing on Friday. That was their fondest wish. "Hit the road, Jesus, and don't you come back no more, no more. Hit the road Jesus, and don't you come back no more." (Billy D. Strayhorn, Resurrection: God's Final Answer)*

That was their plan. But God had a different plan. God brought Jesus back and Jesus "hit the road" to Emmaus and the world has never been the same.

What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us and for the world?

In Luke's account the men in white say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Nancy Claire Pittman's commentary struck me: *We are just as guilty of such a fruitless search. We too want to tend the corpses of long dead ideas and ideals. We cling to former visions of ourselves and our churches as if they might come back to life as long as we hold on to them. We grasp our loved ones too tightly, refusing to allow them to change... We choose to stay with what we know... The words of the unworldly messengers are a challenge to stop hanging on to the dead and to move into new life. They are reminders that the Holy One dwells wherever new life bursts forth. (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 2, pl. 351)*

There's a painful story about a congregation in which a new pastor came to serve and she started leading that church into all sorts of social justice ministries. This was welcomed by some members, but was very upsetting to the folks who thought church was only about singing hymns and having potluck suppers. One Sunday after worship a disgruntled long-time member accosted the pastor in the hallway. "If Jesus knew what this church was doing he'd roll over in his grave!" (Long pause to let that sink in.)

That, of course, is the point...of Easter. Jesus isn't in his grave. Instead he's let loose in the world, continuing to lead his people in ways of love and life and justice. If his life can't be stamped out by the most powerful empire in the history of the world, what else is this Jesus capable of?

Above all, says my friend Dan Erlander, what Resurrection means is that Jesus was right. The Resurrection is God's stamp of approval on Jesus' ministry. It's a giant YES to Jesus' life, to Jesus' teaching. (Dan Erlander, *Manna and Mercy*)

The Resurrection says YES to Jesus' servanthood,

YES to Jesus' kin-dom of inclusion,

YES to Jesus' faithfulness...

even to a cross.

The Resurrection demonstrates that ultimately

love is more powerful than hatred,

life is more powerful than death—

nonviolent resistance and suffering love

are more powerful than stooping to bloodshed and violence.

As followers of this resurrected Jesus,

as the very body of Christ in the world today,

will we be Easter people?

Or will we follow the values of the world?

The world says: Look out for number one.

The world says plop yourself down in front of your TV or computer

and watch whatever junk is on there,

***as long as you buy the products being advertised.***

The world says: She who dies with the most toys wins.

The world says that protecting the environment

is not as important as shareholder return...and consumer convenience.

The world says *protect what you have* at all costs,

with giant fences at your borders,

with a half-trillion-dollar military budget,

with the sacrifice of your beautiful young men and women.

In short, the world gives us a culture of domination and death.

The Resurrection, on the other hand, says

**YES** to the beatitudes—to those who are merciful,

who are peacemakers,

who hunger and thirst after righteousness...

The Resurrection says

Yes to loving our enemies,  
 Yes to human rights for *all*,  
 Yes to caring for the poor,  
 Yes to caring for the Creation  
 Yes to forgiving others and  
 Yes to forgiving ourselves.

So let us live not by the values of the surrounding culture,

but by the values and in the Power of the Resurrected Christ.

Andrew Young tells this story. For you youngsters, Andrew Young was a colleague of Martin Luther King, Jr., in the Civil Rights movement, and ultimately Young went on to serve as US Ambassador to the United Nations and later mayor of Atlanta. (He is also a UCC minister.) He tells the story of one Saturday morning long ago, in which he got his weekend chores done early so he could sit down and enjoy watching on TV his friend, Arthur Ashe, play tennis in an important match. But his kids, who were young at the time, kept roaring around the house making a lot of racket. A couple of times he shushed them and then they came charging through the TV room again. "Hold it!" Young cried. "Let me explain. I'm trying to watch our friend, Arthur, play tennis. It's a close match. I want to see who wins."

His son looked up at him and said, "Dad, it's a tape. Arthur won."

The victory was won for us 2000 years ago. We know how things turn out.

So let us be Easter people.

In a world too often filled with death and darkness,

let us align ourselves with the winning side,  
 the side of light and life and hope.

For the Resurrection demonstrates that

LOVE ALWAYS WINS...

Amen?

**AMEN!**