

April 9, 2023

Easter Sunday: Why are you looking for the living among the dead?

Luke 24:1-12

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Our scripture reading on this Easter weekend comes from Luke in the 24th chapter. Luke writes, *But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.*

The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I'm a big fan of Fairy Tales, and I loved reading them to our boys when they were young. Little Red Riding Hood. Jack and Beanstalk. Sleeping Beauty. Hansel and Gretel. So many good stories! And here's something I learned about Fairy Tales – every one of them begins with "Once upon a time" and ends with "Happily ever after."

The beauty of a Fairy Tale is that when you're in the middle of the story, no matter how dark the forest, no matter how wicked the witch, no matter how big the giant, you know that in the end all will

be well. In the end the characters live "happily ever after."

As I said at the top of the service, the Good News of Easter isn't just that Jesus rose from the dead. It isn't even just that death has been conquered and so it doesn't have the last say in our lives. No. It's so much bigger than that. The Good News of Easter is that in the end all will be well. In the end, God's love triumphs and so do we. And by "we" I mean all of humanity. Resurrection means hopelessness has no hope of taking up permanent residence in our lives.

And that changes how we live now. Today. Without that Good News we'd have reason to be pessimistic about the state of the world. We'd have reason to be despondent and hopeless and throw up our hands and give up. But the Good News of Easter proclaims that no matter how dark the forest, no matter how wicked the witch, no matter how big the giant, in the end all will be well.

St. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Corinthians:

"So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever."

That is the Good News of Easter, the Good News of resurrection at work. That even though the challenges before us seem so big, so daunting, we don't give up and we don't give in to despair. We press ahead, daring to believe that God is at work, making a way where we could not see a way.

It's why we work for peace and justice in the world, even when evil seems to be winning the day.

It's why we seek to steward well this planet God has given us, even though it seems that Mother Nature is under constant attack.

It's why we work for reconciliation among all people, even when it feels that we are more divided than ever.

It's why we fight for the marginalized and the voiceless, even though it seems that those in power are less and less in touch with those who lack it.

Because no matter how dark the forest, no matter how wicked the witch, no matter how big the giant, we know that the story isn't over. The power of the resurrection meets us in our pain and our fear. The power of God's love holds us, heals us and graces us with hope, daring us to believe that even when we can't see a way forward, God can.

Jesus had told the disciples over and over again how the story would end but they didn't hear him. Maybe they couldn't hear him. The magnitude of what he said was greater than their heads could handle and their hearts could hold.

And so, it's no wonder that they sought Jesus among the graves. That's where dead people hang out. They had seen Jesus die and in their experience, death was the end of the story. From where they stood the forest was too dark, the witch too wicked, the giant too great to overcome.

But the angels, who are narrators of God's story, knew better. They knew that Jesus' death wasn't the end, but just the beginning. Which is why they ask that question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Friends, we are a people who are living in the middle of a great story, and in the middle of every great story there's a dark forest, or a wicked witch, or a big giant. But we dare to believe that because of Easter the story isn't over. We dare to believe that in the end we all live happily ever after, whether in life or the next, and so we will not go quietly into the night. We will not give up, because we dare to believe that God has not given up on us.

So, what might that look like? It looks like a couple of brothers who lost everything, including any hope. Two young men who could not see a way forward through the dark forest of grief. But hope came, and a pathway opened, in ways they could never have imagined. Watch this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17aqlszeP94&list=PLotzEBRQdc0eX6sErNJED9JuHzJ1vclu_&index=22

Loss. Grief. Hopelessness. That's the dark forest that Jaylin and Julian were living in, and I can't help but wonder if they didn't believe that that was the end of their story. But love, the real power of resurrection, came in the form a whole community who would not let their story end in defeat. And that community of love wrote a new chapter into the lives of those young men, a chapter in which love wins.

If you're facing a giant today or feel lost in a dark forest, let the Good News of Easter give you hope that your story isn't over. And if the story you're living today is set in the wide-open plains of God's goodness, then invite the Spirit to use you, just as the Spirit used Cady Responds to write a new chapter of love into someone else's story.

Because this is the Good News of Easter: no matter how dark the forest may be, no matter how wicked the witch may seem, nor how big the giant may appear— your story isn't over. God is still writing stories of love and healing in you and through you. And in the end, whether in this life or the next, every story, ends "happily ever after". That's the power of resurrection.

Let's pray....

God of Easter, you are the author of our stories. And like all great stories, ours are filled with giants and dark forests, as well as mountain tops and flower-strewn fields. No matter where we are in the story of our lives today, give us faith to believe that in the risen Christ our stories are never without hope, never without grace, never without your love and presence. Carry us when we cannot see it, until that day when our eyes are open to the turning of a page, to the beginning of a new chapter of life in Christ. Thank you for being a God who meets us in every chapter of life, and promises an ending in which love makes all things new. And together all God's people said...Amen.