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First Presbyterian Church  
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Easter Sunday  
Luke 24:1-12

### **“Practice Resurrection”**

On Thursday morning I asked my most trusted advisor of all things churchy, “What do you think people want to hear on Easter morning?” Lucky for me he didn’t say, “The music,” which, truth be told, every preacher knows is true! (And the music sure is great this morning, isn’t it?)

Instead, my trusted advisor and I talked it through, and afterwards I came to the conclusion that there are two things I really want you to hear this morning.

The first thing I want you to hear is that the Easter story is true. That may seem like an odd statement to come from a minister, but let me explain. I don’t mean true like it’s some sort of mystery to be solved where we collect facts and prove without a doubt the resurrection happened exactly like the Bible said it did. But I mean true in the sense that Easter talks of hope where there is no hope, and points to possibilities where there seem to be none, and assures us that God’s power is greater than any grim, bleak stuff the world can throw at us. And I believe all of that.

Because I’ve seen resurrections happen in people’s lives more times than I can count and maybe you have, too. Maybe you’ve experienced one yourself. I’ve seen possibilities emerge from what appeared to be impossible situations. I’ve seen people face what seemed like the end of everything, what seemed utterly hopeless, only to transform into something new and life giving. I’ve seen families pick-up the pieces after loss and find joy again; I’ve seen people find love again; I’ve seen parents work through painful times with their children; I’ve seen people recover from illnesses and addictions and accidents. I’ve seen people go through their own personal crucifixions and find resurrection on the other side – it’s one of the best parts of being a pastor, in fact – and so I believe the resurrection is real.

So that's the first thing I want you to hear: that the resurrection is real, the Easter story is true, and not because I can prove it beyond a scientific doubt, but because I've seen it happen to too many people not to believe it.

And the second thing I want you to hear this morning is that we need to be people who practice resurrection. There are a lot of people in this world who are fearful and hurting, who the world is hurting; who are experiencing crucifixions; they need a resurrection. The poet Wendell Berry in his poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer's Liberation Front" coined the phrase "practice resurrection", which is a fancy way of saying: defy the odds; go against the grain of the world; live as Christ lived: eat with your enemies; heal the hopeless; be people of peace; love the unlovable.

So that's the second message I want to impart this morning: let's be people who practice resurrection, because our world could use that. Our world needs more people who live lives where love is stronger than hate; and mercy overcomes judgment. Because that practice can change the world.

The resurrection changes things. It changed the lives of the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning; it changed the lives of the disciples; it's changed the lives of billions of people who have heard it ever since then; it's changed my life, and hopefully it has changed or will change yours.

When the women approached the tomb that first Easter morning, they went to see the tomb . . . the final resting place of Jesus. They went like any one of us would go to the grave of a loved one the day after his or her funeral. We go to capture some essence of that person, or to feel closer to that person. As time goes on, we might go to the grave to recall stories of times gone by, maybe laugh a little, maybe cry a little.

It was no different for the women. As far as they knew, the tomb was the site of the last sad chapter in Jesus' once promising story, the closing scene of the saddest story ever told.

But instead, a message greets them. A life-changing message. It's so life changing it's accompanied not by one angel, but two.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen," the angel declares.

Of course, the life changing message doesn't stop there. Because next comes the reminder: "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."

Well, that was all the reminder the women needed, because they ran off to go tell Peter everything they had just heard.

"You won't believe it! You won't believe it!" they say. And guess what? The disciples don't believe it. Not one word. Idle talk, they call it. Silly talk from women! The Greek word used here comes actually from the medical field where it referred to a hallucination that sometimes came with a high fever. So in other words, the women were hallucinating, out of their minds.

Because what the women said just didn't make any sense. The dead don't live. People who are crucified don't come back to life. Death is the final word.

Only Peter gets up and runs off to see what they're talking about. Peter, who spent all of Thursday and Friday running away from Jesus now goes running towards to him. And when he gets to the tomb he goes inside, looks around, sees the linen clothes, and then he – well – he goes home.

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Of course, as you may know, Peter eventually does do something with the incredible news of Jesus' resurrection. In the book of Acts, we hear all about Peter's ministry with the Jews and the Gentiles. He told thousands of people about Christ's resurrection and, in the story Carol read earlier, we heard a little snippet of what Christ's resurrection taught Peter.

Peter learned something essential about God that first Easter. Peter learned that the resurrection is God's way of saying yes to Jesus and everything he preached, and did and believed. Peter learned that by looking at Jesus he could see God, and he saw a God who shows no partiality and who does not play favorites.

My friends, this is an important message for the world to hear, because we live in a world where people believe God does show favorites.

Peter says in his sermon in the book of Acts, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality." This is a defiant statement because it was then and still is today a big contrast to many of the religions advertised, and it is a big contrast to the many strands of Christianity advertised where God is constantly assumed to be on someone's side. People are very good and very adept at claiming that God is on their side. We hear this from politicians and political parties; from people promoting their social cause or speaking against one; and even from nations who just know God is on their side. But what Peter declares today, as a witness to Christ's resurrection, is that God does not play favorites.

What would the world look like if more people lived like they believed that? What would the world like if we truly believed and lived as if God shows no partiality? No partiality to ethnicity, to gender, to race, to political views, to social stances? What would that world like?

I think that world would look like an Easter world, because in that world people would practice resurrection. People would live a life that looks a lot like the one Christ lived, because they'd want to be on God's side, rather than trying to get God on their side.

If Peter had gone home that first Easter and just sat in amazement and done nothing more, the resurrection would have been just another idle tale, and I don't think we'd be here today celebrating it. But because Peter rose to the occasion and told people everything the women told him, we do have a story to tell and more importantly we have a story to live. The news of God's impartial love places a demand on us, and that is to love as impartially as God loves. Peter enacted God's impartial love by eating with Gentiles, whom, for a long time, he believed to be outside the bounds of God's love. We can enact God's impartial love, and therefore practice resurrection, by doing the same. There are many people and many groups of people who are considered by others to be outside of God's love, and that's a sad thing, because God's love is so much bigger and so much more inclusive than we can ever imagine.

We see God's inclusive love on the cross. Jesus' last words were words of love to the two criminals who hung next to him and to the people who executed him-and what did people do when they heard him utter those words of love? They scoffed, they mocked him because they all believed that showing such love to all people is preposterous. It was unheard of because that's not how the world works, right? Wrong, God said on Easter morning. That is how my love works.

Friends, today our work begins. Our mission, as witnesses to Christ's resurrection, is to go and do all of those things Christ did when he was alive so people won't think the story of his resurrection is just another idle tale. We're called to do all of those things Christ did-things like feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, welcome the stranger and outcast, and-yes- to show no partiality.

If we, like Peter, go home feeling amazed at what happened, but then do nothing with this story, the story will end. That will be it. People's assumptions that the resurrection is just another idle tale, will prove true.

And I don't want it to be another idle. I need it to be true. I need the resurrection to be real, and maybe you do, too. When I wake up and hear the news of another shooting or bombing, I don't want to believe that's the last word. I can't believe that's the last word. I refuse to believe that's the last word.

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Friends, I choose to believe in the resurrection not because it makes sense, – but because I don't want to live in a world of fear and hatred, and I don't believe that's what God wants, either. Do you?

I refuse to believe that crucifixion is the true story. I refuse to believe that death, destruction, injustice, hatred and fear are the final word.

Instead, I choose to believe that hope, life, peace and justice is real. I choose to believe that God is with us right here, right now. I choose to believe that God can

see a way forward when we cannot, and who see for all of us a future that is eternal and hopeful.

That is what I believe. And not because I can prove it beyond a scientific doubt, but because I've seen it too many times to believe anything else, and because I have to believe it's true.

And so today, I would ask you to do just that. As the poet Wendell Berry wrote, practice resurrection. Follow Christ's ways: extend a helping hand, open your doors to the stranger, welcome people who think and look and act and believe differently than you; feed the poor, shelter the homeless; speak out against injustice; and show people by your words and actions that God's love knows no boundaries.

Because when we do these things, we live as Easter people. We practice resurrection, and it starts making sense. It becomes real and true.

Because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

Amen.

Sources:

<https://annawoofenden.com/2016/03/29/practice-resurrection-easter-sermon-3292016/>

Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2, commentary for Easter Vigil/Luke 24:1-12