

Easter Day 2019, Luke 24:1-12, April 21, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

The women go to the tomb. They were prepared to honor the body of their friend and teacher. The day before was the sabbath, actually begun on Friday evening. He was hastily buried as the sun started to set, so there hadn't been enough time. On early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, prepared to carefully and properly wrap the body in spices.

It seems to me for too many years the church forgot that women were the first to believe the news of Jesus' resurrection. And they were also the first evangelists. They immediately went to tell the eleven, all men by the way, what they had seen and heard and even believed.

What was the reaction of these men to the witness of these women? Luke tells us, "But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

There's a joke rolling around in here somewhere. And I think it's going to make the men seem a bit foolish. Luke our gospel writer specifically uses the word "idle." He could have used a word like "unbelievable" or "impossible." I could see the disciples regarding news that someone has risen from the dead as impossible. It had never happened before, why think it could happen now? But Luke chose "idle." He plays into the ancient stereotype of women sitting around gossiping with one another, exaggerating on tidbits of information. He directly challenges the assumption held by men who regard what women have to say as mere gossip, and idle chit-chat, to not hear something important because it's a women who says it.

Maybe here's where the joke fits in. It seems that one day in the Garden of Eden Eve says to God, "Lord, I have a problem!" "What's the problem, Eve?" God asks her. "Lord," she says, "I know you've created me and have provided this beautiful garden and all of these wonderful animals, and that hilarious comedy snake, but I'm just not happy." "Why is that, Eve?" came the reply from above. "Lord, I am lonely. And I'm sick to death of apples," she says. "Well, Eve, in that case, I have a solution. I shall create a man for you," the good Lord tells her. "What's a 'man', Lord?" she inquires. "This man will be a flawed creature, with aggressive tendencies, an enormous ego and an inability to listen to you properly. All in all, he'll give you a hard time. But, he'll be big and fast. He'll be really good at fighting and kicking a ball about and hunting fleet-footed ruminants." "Sounds great," says Eve, with an ironically raised eyebrow. "But," God says, "you can have him on one condition." "What's that, Lord?" she asks. "You'll have to let him believe that I made him first."

The long, sad, history of the world and the church includes men not listening to women, and thus excluding them from leadership. This particular passage, in which women are the first to hear, believe, and tell others about Jesus' resurrection, has led in part to our branch of the church to begin ordaining women into the public ministry of Word and Sacrament in 1970. Many would say that was 1,940 years too late.

Nevertheless, they heard. They believed. And they went and told. There, in its most beautiful simplicity, is the mission of the gospel. They are the first preachers of Jesus' resurrection. They have set for all of us, men and women alike, an example to follow.

But why is the resurrection Good News? What difference does it make that this one person is now raised from the dead? And what makes it Good News for you and me today? I'm going to go back to this group of women who came to give Jesus a proper burial.

These were women who were followers of Jesus from the time he began his mission of teaching and healing. They, along with many others, were transformed by his life of love and forgiveness. From the very start they were welcomed, listened to, even forgiven by Jesus in ways they hadn't experienced before. They, along with others, perceived that God indeed was doing a new thing through this man they had grown to love. God was beginning to make things right, turn upside down all the ways we humans divide ourselves from one another. As Mary his mother sang when she heard she was going to give birth to the savior, "You have shown the strength of your arm and scattered the proud in their conceit, casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly."

Yet now it seemed the promise of making things right had gone so terribly wrong. The enthroned mighty ones had killed the one who was making things right. The conceited triumphed over love itself. Was all that Jesus stood for, all he said and did, all the healing and forgiving, was it all for nothing? So it might seem as they went to the tomb to perform one final act of love, a proper burial, for the one person who showed them what God's love was truly like.

Raising Jesus from the dead is God's great, resounding "Yes." Love wins. Forgiveness, healing, restoring what is wrong, and reversing the powers and authorities that seek to suppress and oppress shall not be defeated. God restores and is restoring humanity to live in community with one another. Swords shall be beaten into plows that till the land. Weapons of mass destruction will be transformed to combines and harvesters that shall feed all people, and no one shall be hungry anymore.

The women, and the men they told, were transformed by this message, by this new reality. Death no longer raises its fearful spectre. The powers of death which tried to defeat God's love are themselves defeated.

Jesus raised from the dead means we too are transformed. We are freed from all the ways a death-held-captive world tries to separate and diminish and oppress true humanity and human community. Women, like those who told of Jesus' resurrection, are being heard, speaking with their own voices. Men, in contrast with that silly joke, are being freed from the deadly captivity of believing they must and always be first. God is indeed doing a new thing. But God does this new thing through us; through the ones who are being transformed ourselves. Just as those first women left the tomb to witness to others, so too are we sent out from here, to give witness with our very lives, that Jesus is raised from the dead. Amen.