

Reflection: Practicing Easter
Easter Sunday 2010
Luke 24: 1-12

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April 4th

Although I have been here at Dunbar for over eight months now...every special Sunday and every seasonal event brings with it a bunch of questions on my part as to what the practice and norm, here at Dunbar, is. For example...this is the most significant Sunday of the year and so began the planning a few weeks back. With regard to Easter Sunday I quickly learned that there were important traditions for this community not the least of which was the flowering of the cross—the important ritual of claiming the crucified cross of Good Friday to the resurrection empty, new life cross of the resurrection. So too, I quickly learned of Greg's plans and hopes for a music Sunday to carry us on this high holy day—music that would speak emotionally and spiritually in addition to our words and actions. You will believe me when I say that he was bouncing off the walls with enthusiasm and planning. There is nothing quite like planning for the highest Sunday of the year.

I share in that enthusiasm. But with it I also bring some hesitancy, maybe some slight anxiety. For there is always a challenge associated with this kind of Sunday. And that challenge comes if our own emotions or enthusiasm don't quite match those of the calendar. Sometimes we aren't quite at Easter when Easter Sunday arrives. Sometimes our personalities aren't completely Easter-ish so to speak. I shared with the ministry team that often in the past I have worked with somewhat reserved congregations. So on Easter we would create all sorts of ways to begin Easter worship in order to help people in their Easter moment—only to be met with metered responses and sometimes people keeping their Easter alleluia's to them

Sometimes we aren't quite at Easter when Easter arrives.

If this is at all the case for us...then we are in good company. Going to the scripture text from the gospel of Luke that speaks of that first Easter morning—we hear of confusion, fear and perplexity just as much as we hear joy and proclamation. The joy of Easter is immensely important to remember—but joy is something we have attached to this story as people who have heard it from a distance and because of how it has been embodied over the years. We also know the joy attached to it because we know how the story continues on from this original scene.

On that first Easter morning...as dawn was barely breaking...Luke tells us that the women went to the tomb preparing to anoint the dead body of Jesus with spices. Instead they found the stone rolled away and the body missing.

They did not see this as good news. They were perplexed. Then they were terrified as two men in dazzling clothes appeared to assure them that Jesus was risen. Not knowing what to make of it they left to tell the others. And, the gospel says...as they spoke the words to the men, the men accused them of coming up with an idle tale. How could they create such a thing?

The news that the women proclaimed that Jesus is risen was beyond comprehension, beyond anything in their frame of reference, beyond belief and so it was easier to dismiss the women at first. Luke tells us that Jesus had told his disciples that he would rise again on the third day but still it seemed too difficult to believe that it had actually happened.

When the women came racing back with the news that these words had come to pass, the disciples should have been prepared, eager, receptive, believing. Maybe the news of Easter was simply too overwhelming for them to believe. Or maybe in that brief moment when they first heard of the possibility that Jesus words were true they began to realize how their lives would change—and that too was strangely comforting and terrifying at the same time. Gradually from the first admittance from the women, to the running off of Peter to see for himself to the gradual spreading of the news, appropriation started to happen for the disciples and they discovered life would never be the same.

If it is not an idle tale then death no longer has the final answer

If it is not an idle tale then the truth and justice Jesus lived and taught is what really matters.

If it is not an idle tale then even the darkest places of our lives will see new light.

If Jesus is risen, then—we are not alone and never can be. God is there to create and recreate life out of death—hope out of suffering. How does such a radical message not take a little time to absorb?

But this is the reason that Easter Sunday has to be so bold in our proclamation. Because at least once a year, if not every Sunday, we need a little dose of the miraculous, a reminder of something that seems so unbelievable that we almost want it to be an idle tale. For if it is true it means we can really live with a hope that is life-saving. I like to call this practicing Easter. Regardless of whether we feel it with our emotions or spirit when Easter Sunday rolls around on our calendar there is going to come a time when we need the rehearsed story of Easter to be on repeat play in our hearts.

Author and Spiritual Director, Joyce Rupp shares such a moment in her book *Out of the Ordinary*. She talks about an art print she has by a famous Southwest artist, Ettore (Ted) DeGrazia.

DeGrazia's print shows the body of Jesus wrapped in a traditional mummy-like white shroud, lying on a stone slab. But the body is not alone. All

around it are shawled, sorrowing angels keeping vigil. The soft rainbow colors of the angels make the darkness of the tomb lighter. The figures are in sorrow as they sit but they seem to watch with patient and trusting vigilance, attending the One who has given all—they wait for resurrection. What they are doing is holding a tomb watch.

In this print Joyce Rupp came to realize that each of us needs “tomb watches” every now and then. Maybe we are keeping vigil for a part of ourselves that lies dormant and seemingly dead or lost or has fallen into a coffin of depression or despair. Maybe that shrouded figure in us is the loss of a way to pray, a deadening unforgiveness, or a body experiencing its physical limitations. Maybe our “tomb watch” is our becoming the angel of vigil, attending someone else in pain or sickness. Maybe the vigil we keep is for the people of our world as we weep for their woe or for the Earth itself as she continues to experience humanity’s reckless waste and the grime of greed.

We all have our angels. They sit like DeGrazia’s shawled figures who lovingly attend the body of Jesus. They wait with us in our dark places until the light returns. They wait as people who have rehearsed and heard the Easter story. They wait as ones who know that death is not the end of the story.

Easter, being Easter people, is about having an amazing capacity to “tomb watch.” Not because we are stuck in Good Friday. Easter, rehearsing Easter and hearing the story of Easter is about knowing that we can sit in even the darkest places of our life or the lives of others and wait and believe in life no matter how dark and cold the space feels.

Easter, and the story it is—means a time to pull out all the stops and proclaim and sing and make it as big as possible whether we are here enthusiastically, reluctantly, with scepticism or somewhere in-between. Because in hearing and in believing we change the way we live—and nothing will be the same again.

May it be so.