

A Contagious Resurrection
Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022
Rev. Cindy Maddox

Luke 20:1-12

I am so sorry not to be with you in person for Easter.
After two years of this pandemic, my family and I finally got it,
during Holy Week.

From a church standpoint, it's difficult to imagine worse timing.
In 20 years of ministry I have never missed a holiday.

There was one time, ten years ago, that I woke up on Easter Saturday
with laryngitis.

I was still able to preach,
though the congregation had to listen very carefully to hear me.
I preached about not wanting to be voiceless for the resurrection.
This week I kept thinking "I don't want to be contagious for the resurrection!"
But here we are! So thank you to Ben Gottfried, Green Bouzard, and Brynn Artley
for their work to make this happen technologically,
and to Pastor Lauren for her steady presence in picking up the slack.

All four gospels tell the Easter story, but they all tell the story differently.

Different people go to the tomb;
they find different things there;
different words are spoken.

In Luke's account, one of the distinguishing factors is the disciples' response
to the women's news:

It seemed to them an idle tale.

That's how the New Revised Standard Version translates it.

Scholar David Lose says this is

"actually a fairly generous translation of the Greek work *leros* . . .

[which] is the root of our word 'delirious.'

So in short, they thought what the women said
was crazy, nuts, utter nonsense."¹

You can see the facial expressions that go along with such a pronouncement,

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/if-its-not-hard-to-believe-youre-probably-not-paying-attention>

can't you?

A rolling of the eyes and a shaking of the head.
Maybe even a smirk. A disdainful dismissal.

I'm not insulting the disciples here—I probably would have done the same.
The old Monty Python joke says that nobody expects the Spanish inquisition.
Well, nobody expects resurrection, either.

Given the variety of beliefs we always have represented in worship,
plus visitors in person and online,
I'm guessing we have a really wide variety of beliefs about Christ's resurrection.
There may be some for whom the bodily resurrection of Jesus
is a core tenet of their faith,
without which there is no faith.

And there are others who believe that Jesus' spirit coming back to life
within the community was quite enough of a miracle on its own.
And still others don't believe in it at all, and all are welcome.
It is important for us to make room for a spectrum of beliefs
because insistence on this one belief
has led too many people to walk away entirely.

A few years ago a preacher made headlines for her sermon
"I'm your pastor and I don't care what you believe."
Her point was that people get hung up on dogma,
and it really didn't matter to her **what** her parishioners believed,
but that they **did** believe.

I both agree and disagree with this perspective
because there are some things I do hope you believe in.

I said earlier that one year I preached
"I don't want to be voiceless for the resurrection."
But if I am truthful, it wasn't the first time in life that I had found myself voiceless,
or been voiceless because I could not find myself.
There was a time when I was silent
because I could not believe, could not conceive
of anything dead returning to life.
I knew about spiritual death. I lived in the tomb,

a cave carved out by pain and shame and misplaced blame
and sealed by a rock of rage.

I didn't think anything could budge that rock.

But then miracles happened—

tiny miracles, little more than a breath at times and as easily ignored.

But those breath miracles came one after another until the stone was . . .

not rolled away, nothing that dramatic.

Breath by breath the stone was inched away,

first just a sliver to let in a little light and air.

But that sliver was enough to make me believe there could be more.

I pried on that rock from within and others pried on it from beyond,

and God was in the prying and the scraped knuckles

and the inching of the stone.

Now I believe in resurrection—

not because I'm sure about what happened to Jesus,

but because I am sure about what happened to me.

“The Resurrection is not just something that happened to Jesus a long time ago.

Resurrection is a continuous possibility for us. . . .

It is a gift of God that raises us out of whatever grave we have fallen into.²

I believe in resurrection . . . because I have experienced it.

I know that some of you are struggling.

You may feel like you're living in a tomb.

You're struggling with depression or anxiety

or the special hell that is both.

You are lost in grief.

You're torn between your aging parents and your struggling kids.

You are carrying way too many burdens for one set of shoulders.

Or your heart for justice feels overwhelmed because you've lost hope

in anything ever getting better.

So my question to you is: do you believe?

Do you believe in resurrection?

Do you believe in the resurrection of that dream—

the one that used to light up your eyes,

² Feldmeyer, Dean.

but now you're afraid you'll never achieve?

Do you believe in that resurrection?

Do you believe in the resurrection for that marriage that's on the rocks?

Or perhaps in the resurrection that will come for you as individuals,
rather than together?

Do you believe in the resurrection of hope for healing,

or the resurrection of peace for the journey that will not end in a cure?

Do you believe in the resurrection of a mutual relationship with your children
or an honest relationship with your parents?

Do you believe in the resurrection of joy, even in the face of sorrow?

I believe.

I believe in resurrection because I have experienced it,

but also because I have witnessed it, so many times, in the church.

I witnessed a baby boy who wasn't supposed to survive a traumatic birth,
but who beat the odds.

I witnessed the stubborn love of parents who refused to give up.

I saw a person find God again after the loss of a marriage.

I saw a woman come back to life after the death of a spouse.

I saw a young man accept himself because the church accepted him.

I believe in resurrection.

Do you believe?

Because that's what we need. We need some resurrection.

Many years ago, a contemporary Christian artist recorded a song called

"Was it a morning like this?"

Was it a morning like this, when the sun still hid from Jerusalem,
and Mary rose from her bed to tend the Lord she thought was dead?

Was it a morning like this, when Mary walked down from Jerusalem,
and two angels stood at the tomb, bearers of news she would hear soon?

"Was it a morning like this?"

When I first heard those words, back when I had brown hair
and a newly printed diploma from a Christian college,

and I thought that as long as I followed Jesus, life would be hunky dory . . .

yeah, back then, I thought this song was about the weather.

Was it a morning like this—windy and cold, or warm and sunny?
Or maybe the point was that it was a morning like any other—
just an ordinary morning, interrupted by miracle.

Now I know that the real question is:

Was it a morning like this, when life is so “lifey,” as Anne Lamott says?

Was it a morning like this, when we’re not sure what comes next.

Was it a morning like this, when our joy is almost dead and gone?

Was it a morning like this, when our hope is lost

and we don’t know where it went or how to find it,

or what we would do with it if we did.

Was it a morning with unpaid bills and unrequited love

and tantrum-throwing toddlers or too many silent meals.

Was it a morning with fresh grief and old wounds

and the scent of despair in our nostrils?

Was it a morning like this, when we’re not sure we believe in resurrection?

It was. It was a morning of all of this and more.

And yet . . . the stone was rolled away.

The grave did not win.

The strength of death was no match for the power of love.

You see, that’s the flip side.

When we say “yes” to one thing we say “no” to another.

One scholar puts it this way:

“To believe in resurrection . . . is more than saying yes to the claim

made by the women and, eventually, the men in the Easter story.

It is at the same time saying ‘no’ to the power of death and destruction

that surrounds us.

In place of the bad news we hear and the bad experiences we have,

we make the claim that there is a sustaining power, God,

who brings life out of death and reconciliation out of conflict. . . .

To commit ourselves to [the claim of resurrection] opens the door

to new life for ourselves

and for acts of love and reconciliation in the world.”³

Resurrection’s “yes” requires a “no” to death.

³ Arland Hultgren, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-3/commentary-on-luke-241-12-3>

What in your life do you need to say “no” to,
so that you can say “yes” to resurrection?

What in our society must we say “no” to,
so that our world can experience resurrection?

It’s up to us.

It’s up to us to share the good news.

It’s up to us to spread the hope.

In fact, let’s be contagious with it.

If death can be contagious, why not life?

If despair can be contagious, why not hope?

Let’s be contagious with hope, contagious with love, contagious with resurrection.

Then we will know the truth and loudly proclaim:

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen, indeed!