

Riverside United Church
April 13, 2025

Scripture Lesson: Luke 24: 1-12

The Resurrection of Jesus

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 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.’ Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,
lead us to deeper understanding of you,
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

“Living with Perplexity and Purpose”

Rev. Paul Dillman

Last weekend was the Master’s golf tournament and I know that some of you may have watched it. I am not a golfer and don’t usually watch golf on TV, especially if curling is another option. However it would have been helpful at the curling rink on Monday morning if I had watched the Master’s because that was all that anyone was talking about.

I remember hearing a story years ago about how there was a scheduling issue with the Masters and Easter weekend. Back then, it was seen as a conflict. The story is told of a television executive who upon hearing about the conflict, wondered about the possibility of moving Easter and said, “Who is in charge of Easter - see if they will move the date!”

Who is in charge of Easter?

As we gather on this Easter morning, we hear Luke’s account of the first Easter morning

when the women go to the tomb and discover that Jesus' body is not there. They were perplexed by this. They were the first disciples/followers to be perplexed by the resurrection, but not the last. When two men speak to them, they begin to experience something beyond what they expected. The men asked, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" They remember what Jesus said, and then they went and told the remaining 11 male disciples what they had seen, heard, remembered and experienced, and the disciples thought it was an idle tale.

The Easter story is a difficult one to comprehend. It defies the scientific and rational minds of then and certainly now. It is challenging to understand and yet if Jesus' story had ended in crucifixion, we probably would have never heard of him. It's the Easter story that empowered his followers to continue to remember, to share, to live his way and the truth and love that he revealed. Easter invites us into wonder and hope. Who's in charge of Easter?

Easter is good news - it's the gospel and yet it is difficult to live it out in our world where so many would dismiss it as a idle tale. A number of years ago, I came across a reading that we have used every couple of years at the Sunrise service. Unfortunately I have lost track of who created it. We shared it this morning and it's time to bring it inside. The reading is a series of 29 statements and when we read them from top to bottom, it does a good job of describing much of our culture's ambiguity and response to Easter. It is entitled, "Is this news good?"

1	Easter is here
2	But for many of us this is not the ultimate reality.
3	There is too much pain and suffering in our world today.
4	Death has the last word
5	It would therefore be foolish to say that
6	The life and death of a first-century Jewish man named Jesus makes a difference.
7	Why?
8	Might makes right
9	Power is superior to compassion and
10	Despair is stronger than hope.
11	So I refuse to believe
12	A man can come back from the dead
13	Sometimes the most important facts are the hardest to accept
14	Resurrection is a false hope.

15	How can you say
16	An empty tomb changes everything.
17	Don't you see
18	"God loves the world"
19	Is a lie.
20	"Money is God"
21	And
22	"The one who dies with the most toys wins"
23	I will tell you what I tell my children
24	There is no more to this world than what _{you} can sense, hold and buy
25	There is no mystery in everyday life, and
26	There is nothing sacred about ordinary things and people
27	Many of us simply do not believe that
28	God can give life to the dead, bring light from darkness, and create something out of nothing
29	But what if the testimony of the women at the tomb was true? Then ...

But what if the testimony of the women at the tomb was true. Then ... what difference would that make to who we are? Peter who may have been one who thought it was an idle tale - ran to the tomb and experienced the wonder and grace for himself, and he was transformed by resurrection hope and peace.

The power of Easter is that it gives us a new way of viewing our experience and our world. It's perplexing, but it's also transforming. What would happen if we turned the reading we just heard upside down and read the phrases from bottom to the top. What is Is this News Good? Becomes Good News this is!

(Read the above table bottom to top - phrase 29 to phrase 1)

Why? The life and death of first-century Jewish man named Jesus makes a difference. It would therefore be foolish to say that death has the last word, There is too much pain and suffering in the world today, but for many of us this is not the ultimate reality. Easter is here.

Who is in charge of Easter? Well, the date moves every year according the moon and the spring equinox, but the experience is offered by the Holy gently and restlessly seeking to

help each of us to know a greater and deeper truth of love and hope. It's perplexing.

And yet, not all truth can be explained logically and rationally.

The two men asked the women at the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" It's a question that transcends the story and invites us to live with purpose. We live with so much that leads to death - the death of dignity and human worth, despair of life being beyond our control, death of empathy and acceptance of difference. We are experiencing forces in our world that are distressing and frightening and causing so much anguish. So, how can we seek life amidst this reality?

Easter offers us a framework of perspective and purpose. We are invited to live with perplexity and purpose as Easter people. Yes, the story and truth of Easter may be perplexing to the mind, but it offers purpose to the soul. Easter reminds us that life can emerge out of death, hope amidst despair, light into the darkness. We can be inspired to live with values and love that turns upside down conventional ways and wisdom.

Who is in charge of Easter? The spirit of the Risen Christ is at work in wonderful and mysterious ways. Yet, one answer to that question could be that we are, for we have the capacity to choose how this truth of love and hope will affect how we live in the world, what we hold to be true, to be important. We cannot control how hope is shared and spread, but we can tune into that energy and find the courage and the joy to resist falling for lines such as "money is God" and "the one who dies with the most toys wins."

A few weeks ago, when our Sunday worship moved to be on Zoom only, we were having a discussion about the interaction between Pilate and Jesus. And one of the better known details of those conversations is Pilate asking the question, "What is Truth?" As the conversation drew to a close, Rev. Ken Robinson spoke up on Zoom and said that maybe - "What is truth?" isn't the best the question. He suggested that the important question is: What truth do we choose to live?

Easter reminds us that we can live with perplexity and purpose, as we experience the good news of new life and possibility. So, amidst our Hallelujahs may our questions mingle with our convictions, our doubts keep us asking and thinking, so that we may be open to wonder and see how our lives and world is renewed in a Holy way. Amen.