

March 27, 2016 Easter Morning

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Isaiah 65:17-25, Acts 10:34-43

Luke 24:1-12, with lines from John 20

(David Lose, *Dear Working Preacher*, posted 3/24/13; link to Anna Carter Florence from 6/2/08 Preaching Moment 010; Michael Joseph Brown, *Working Preacher Commentary* on Luke 24, for 3/26/16; WDIO News on Gloria Dei LC in Duluth for 3/19/16; Bp Ann Svennungsen's *Ministerium Sermon* 11/5/15; K. White, *Onward and Upward in the Garden* (Beacon, 2002), pp. xviii –xix)

Grace and peace to you my sisters and brothers in the risen Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia.

Can I get a witness? I know, rhetoric like this isn't as familiar in our community as some.

I ask the question, Can I get a witness? and you respond, Amen.

Let's try it again: Can I get a witness? Amen.

No one expected the resurrection. Can I get a witness? Amen.

Sure, Jesus may have predicted it: he'd talked about all sorts of things, and on the third day he'd said he'd rise, but, really, they didn't understand his words, how could they?

No one expected the resurrection.

We shout Alleluia, with a big exclamation point at the end, maybe a question mark is more honest.

We expect this day. We look forward to it.

We pray all through Lent and The Three Day. We may travel to be with friends or family.

We prepare music, order flowers, get out new candles, and practice hymns on the trumpet.

We crack open the Hallelujah box even with most of us knowing full well what's inside.

We plan our dinners, color our eggs, hope that the Easter Bunny shows up, and fret about what to wear.

We expect this day. We expect the resurrection in a certain kind of defined box...

But on that first Easter morning, no one expected it, in fact most didn't believe it.

In Luke the women's words aren't even recorded, but in John's Gospel, one of the very first Easter sermons is on the lips of Mary Magdalene, and it's short and mighty: ***I have seen the Lord.***

They'd been to the tomb, spices in hand, ready as ever to finally finish this burial.

Who wouldn't want to be done with that devastating day when Jesus had died?

Who wouldn't be terrified by the politics and the fear, tangled up between Pilate and the religious leaders?

When they found the tomb empty, the men in dazzling clothes (Luke doesn't say they were angels, but maybe they were) the men met them there saying,

"He's not here, he has risen.

Why do you look for the living among the dead?***Remember, remember what he told you."***

But they hadn't remembered, or understood, not really, how could they? No one expected it.

With all that adrenaline, the women—Mary and Mary and Joanna—are running, running to tell the rest.

They don't go to the street corner. They don't post it on Facebook.

They're tired. Probably still perplexed and terrified, maybe feeling guilty or anxious.

They go to the closest friends of Jesus. The ones most likely to believe them, to understand.

The ones who are still crying like there is no tomorrow, locked away, all Friday night and Saturday, too.

In John's Gospel, Mary says it oh, so simply, "I have seen the Lord." That's her witness, her truth.

In Luke the friends respond with the Greek word Le-ros; it's translated in our bibles: an idle tale.

"But these words seemed to the closest companions of Jesus an idle tale, they did not believe them."

An idle tale: that is probably a generous translation, remember that Le-ros is the root of words like *delirious*.

They think Mary and the rest of the women are Le-ros, delirious, nuts, crazy.

They think it's a bunch garbage, non-sense, oh, I'm trying to be kind here to tender ears.

They didn't expect the women's witness, "I have seen the Lord."

Michael Joseph Brown, from Dayton Theological Seminary, reminds us that less than a century back, women and people of color wouldn't be considered a credible witness.

They didn't expect the resurrection, and, really, when we're honest, I'm not sure we do either.

Oh, we expect Easter, the holiday, but the resurrection? A savior who rises from the dead?

A savior who is truly capable of new life...even for us? Even in the greatest oppressions in our world?

Even as we hear about the bombings in Brussels?

Even as we wait for the decisions about Jamar Clark's death and face the needed, hard, honest work before us and our community?

Even as we mourn and grieve and wonder?

Really? A savior who dies and rises that we and our world might be redeemed? Might live anew?

Might forgive as we have been forgiven and then start fresh, start new, start in hope.

I don't know about you, but far too often *I am the one* hunting amongst the dead for the living.

Resurrection is so out there, this whole radical story of God's great love for the world is such a scandal, so disturbing, some good doubt may be the most honest response.

Then we know we're listening,

then these nice Easter stories haven't become so familiar that we forget how crazy the gospel really is!
Can I get a witness? _____

Really, that's the point, we just need a witness, and Mary is that very witness: I have seen the Lord.
Her witness, her testimony, her experience doesn't MAKE the others believe, but it sends Peter to the tomb
to check it out and he comes back in amazement, in wonder.
That's our gift to one another, not forced belief, not a lack of doubt, but being an honest witness to what
we've experienced and seen and heard.
That's what Mary did. Same in our reading from Acts, when Peter has become the witness.
That's what we do. And, the Holy Spirit will do the rest—can I get a witness? _____

Resurrection is difficult, it's hard, it's unexpected.

There's that old joke about the constants in life being death and taxes.
As Anna Carter Florence says, "So what happens when the dead don't stay dead?"
Resurrection new life is difficult to comprehend, it's out of control, it doesn't feel logical.
No wonder the friends call it an "idle tale."

If our calling is anything, it is to be a witness, to dare to name both the places of death and the places of
resurrection in our lives, in the lives of those around us, to point out God still at work in our midst.
Where death and fear and isolation could have the last word, **in the resurrection love triumphs.**
That may seem crazy, that may seem impossible, like an idle tale.
Our role is to simply witness to what we experience.
This season I've been thinking about Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Duluth, a congregation not so different
than ours, but they experienced a fire just five weeks ago.
They are still waiting to see if the building is stable enough to be reused but the congregation continues,
God's people go on, still worshiping, still serving the monthly meal to the community. A witness.
I've also been watching the witness of a friend and his wife as they live with his stage 4 cancer.
Every two weeks they go together for his chemo and they spend the day together, a chemo date, they call it,
courageously facing all the unknowns but doing it together. A witness to the resurrection.
You, people of Hope, you are witnesses, each of you.
Witnesses to both the suffering of the cross and the new life of Easter morning, really every morning.
Oh, I could tell you stories, plenty more. And I know you could tell me stories, too.

Some would say they are idle tales, but that's not mine to judge.

My role—our role—is simply to witness to the unexpected, oh-so-needed-places of resurrection, new life.

Are they expected? Easy? Boxed up and defined?

Not usually, but that's how resurrection new life was that first Easter, and that's how it is, still today.

E.B.White, the author of *Charlotte's Web*, collected his wife Katharine's essays after she died.

He compiled them into a book on gardening for which he penned an introduction.

At the conclusion of the introduction, he paints this lovely, vivid picture of “Katharine in the fall, planting the spring garden she knew she would not see. This is what he wrote:”

“Armed with a diagram and a clipboard, Katharine would get into a shabby old Brooks raincoat much too long for her, put on a little round wool hat, pull on a pair of overshoes, and proceed to the director's chair – a folding canvas thing – that had been placed for her at the edge of the plot.

There she would sit, hour after hour, in the wind and the weather, while Henry Allen produced dozens of brown paper packages of new bulbs and a basketful of old ones, ready for the intricate interment.

As the years went by and age overtook her, there was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance on this awesome occasion – the small, hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in the dying October, **calmly plotting the resurrection.**”

Calmly plotting the resurrection.

Mary and Mary and Joanna, Peter, E.B.White, Katharine White, the people of Gloria Dei, my friend and his spouse, you, each of you, witnesses to the resurrection.

Keep watching, keep witnessing, keep plotting, keep noticing the new life, even when you don't expect it or understand it, even when you can't yet see it.

Can I get a witness?

Amen