

03/27/2016 ~ Resurrection of the Christ ~ Easter Day ~ Also Known as The Feast of the Resurrection ~ *Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12; Added Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 [ILV] ~ * During Eastertide a reading from Acts is often substituted for the lesson from the Hebrew Bible.

A READING FROM THE GOSPELS — Luke 24:1-12 [Inclusive Language Version]

INTRODUCTION: It needs to be noted there are no Resurrection stories in Scripture, no stories about Jesus emerging from the tomb. There are only post resurrection stories. It also needs to be noted Resurrection is not reanimation nor is it resuscitation. That has never been a Christian belief. Resurrection is what it says it is: Resurrection. Last, in an era when women were at best second class citizens, women are deeply involved throughout the post resurrection stories in all the Gospels. This fact in that particular era confronts us with an obvious question: what does that fact about the role the women played tell us about the message of equity offered by God? Hear now this reading from the Gospel we have come to know as Luke.

[1] On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, the women came to the tomb, bringing spices they had prepared. [2] They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; [3] when they entered they did not find the body of Jesus.

[4] They were at a loss as to what to think about this. Then suddenly two figures in dazzling garments stood beside them. [5] Terrified, the women bowed to the ground. One of the two said, “Why do you look for the Living One among the dead? Jesus is not here; Christ has risen. [6] Remember what Jesus said to you, while you were still in Galilee— [7] that the Chosen One must be delivered into the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again.” [8] With this reminder the words of Jesus came back to them.

[9] When they returned from the tomb, they told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. [10] Now the women who had experienced this and reported all these things were Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James. The other women who were with those three also told these things to the apostles. [11] But these words seemed to those who listened to be an idle tale, nonsensical, and they refused to believe them. [12] Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Upon getting there this apostle stooped and looked in but could see nothing but the linen cloths, the wrappings, on the ground. Then Peter left, amazed at what had occurred.

This is the Gospel of Jesus, Who is the Christ, the Messiah, the One Who has been raised.

Christ Lives

“Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Upon getting there this apostle stooped and looked in but could see nothing but the linen cloths, the wrappings, on the ground. Then Peter left, amazed at what had occurred.” — Luke 24:12.

The disciple headed back down the road. Peter— his real name was Simon and since the day the Rabbi, the teacher, had given him the name Peter that is what everyone called him— Peter was exhausted.

Of course, he had been running. He was a little older than the others who followed the Rabbi so that rag-tag group looked to him for leadership. Despite his age, he was not in bad shape. So, it may not have simply been the distance covered running to the tomb which led to the exhaustion.

No... no, indeed— there were other reasons. The first was that he really expected to see the remains of his friend in that tomb, no matter what the women said. Tombs... tombs— these were the final resting place, the final destination, were they not?

But his friend *Yahushua*— in Greek the name is Jesus, but Peter knew the Rabbi by the Jewish name *Yahushua*— *Yahushua* kept saying wait for three days after I die. Just wait three days.

And so, after three days— somehow, some way— Jesus was no longer there, no longer in the tomb where Peter knew they had placed the earthly remains of his friend.

Peter had watched when they buried the Rabbi. And now the tomb was empty.

So, was the exhaustion felt by Peter caused by the strain of running? Probably not. Surely, at least in part, the exhaustion arose from seeing nothing in the tomb except the wrappings on the ground. It left Peter emotionally exhausted.

After all, when Jesus preached all over Galilee, Peter was there. When Jesus healed the sick, Peter was there. When Jesus fed five thousand, Peter was there. When Jesus recited parables— something the Rabbi did over and over and over again— Peter was there.

When Jesus asked that pivotal question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter had the answer. Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. Right after that, when Jesus was transfigured and the three disciples heard a voice, loud and clear, a voice which insisted Jesus was the Chosen One, Peter... was... there. (Slight pause.)

And yes, when Jesus was taken as a prisoner of the state, Peter was there also. When Jesus was taken to the house of the High Priest not only was Peter there. Upon being confronted, Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus. And this happened just as the Rabbi said it would. The painful memory of the incident made Peter sigh as he walked. (Slight pause.)

What came next, in retrospect, seemed inevitable. Having become a prisoner of the state, Jesus— Jesus, Peter’s friend, Jesus, Peter’s teacher, Jesus, Peter’s guide, Jesus, Peter’s companion— Jesus was murdered by the state, crucified by the Romans. And Peter was there when that happened too, watching from afar as his friend... died.

But now, now this... this... empty tomb— the wrappings... so yes— Peter was... exhausted. And no, this exhaustion did not come from running. This was emotional exhaustion. Peter was spent. (Slight pause.)

Peter trod toward the center of Jerusalem, toward the house where the other disciples waited, knowing there was yet another emotional hill to climb. He needed to face the women.

It was the women who, on the first day of the week, at dawn, went to the tomb. It was the women who found the tomb empty. It was the women who were told “Why do you look for the Living One among the dead? Jesus is not here; Christ has risen.”

It was the women who, on returning from the tomb told the Eleven and the others about the empty tomb. It was the women... who no one believed. It was the women... who were ridiculed. It was the women... who were told their tale was idle, nonsensical.

And now Peter— the only one among the other followers of Jesus who even went to the tomb, Peter— the only one among them willing to face the reality of the empty tomb, Peter— the leader of this small band— Peter needed to affirm the women. They were, after all, right. He wondered if they would, in turn, ridicule him because of how the others had ridiculed them. (Slight pause.)

When Peter burst through the door into the large room where the whole group waited there was a cacophony of chatter. Peter raised a hand. What had been a wall of noise turned into immediate silence.

“It’s true,” he said, gesturing toward the women who were gathered in a corner.

“They are right. The tomb is empty. (Slight pause.) I’m exhausted. Let me sit.”

And so he did. He sat on a bench. Perhaps the flood of emotions finally caught up with him. Suddenly it felt like the weight of the world was pressing down on his back. The women were the first to notice his distress.

From the corner of the room, this question was asked: “Peter, are you all right?”

Peter knew that voice. It was Mary of Magdala. She was perceptive. She knew when something was amiss before anyone else knew.

Peter, his eyes closed, responded. “Yes. I’m all right. I’ll be fine.”

And that’s when it happened. His body began to quake. Peter sobbed. Tears streamed down his face, his beard. He wept and wept and wept.

“Peter? Peter?” It was Mary’s voice. He was sure it was Mary’s voice.

The disciple felt a hand softly touch his shoulder. The touch was tender, healing, loving... familiar. “That is sweet of her,” thought Peter. “Mary is trying to offer solace in my time of need.”

After a bit, Peter got control of himself. Slowly, the crying ceased. Slowly, he wiped the tears away. “After all,” he thought trying to force his sense of logic and order to impose itself on his emotions, “there are only so many tears one can shed before one runs dry.”

The hand on his shoulder patted three times and then lifted away. He opened his eyes. Across the room was Mary of Magdala and the other women. Quickly he looked around. No one was behind him. No one was near him. No one had dared come near

him.

“Mary! Were you just near me? Behind me?”

All she offered was a quizzical look. “No.”

“Someone was behind me. Someone was touching me.”

Everyone in the room stared at him not knowing what to say. This was, after all, Peter. He saw everything clearly. He had been the first one to see Jesus as the Messiah. He had been the first one to see Jesus as the Christ.

He pointed toward the end of the room. He pointed toward the women. He shouted as loud as he could. “You are right!” he said. “Jesus is risen! Jesus is the Christ.”

The women smiled. It was a knowing smile. But they said nothing.

Peter was emotionally drained but at the same time somehow filled with joy. Again, quieter Peter said it: “Jesus is risen! Jesus is the Christ.” (Long pause.) Amen.

03/27/2016 - Easter Day, The Feast of the Resurrection

United Church of Christ, First Congregational, Norwich, New York

BENEDICTION: Hear now this blessing and then please join with me in the responsive Easter acclamation found in the bulletin. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the love of Christ, Jesus, and in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit this day and forever. And please join with me in the Easter

Acclamation.

ONE: Rejoice, people of God! Christ is risen from the dead! Go in peace to love and serve God. Christ is with you always. Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

MANY: Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “I need to say two things: first, in Aramaic, the language which would have been spoken in Roman Palestine in New Testament times, to be saved meant to be made alive. Second, I am sure the well known American composer Irving Berlin was a nice fellow. He wrote *Easter Parade* and also a lesser know Easter Song, *It’s a Lovely Day, Happy Easter*. I want to suggest, however, that to merely say, ‘Happy Easter’ is not a Christian sentiment. So, let me make a suggestion: if someone walks up to you today and says, ‘Happy Easter’ shake their hand and say, ‘Christ is risen.’ ‘Christ is risen’ is the Christian sentiment.”