

Easter Sunday: The Resurrection of our Lord, C
Acts 10:34-43
I Corinthians 15:19-26
Luke 24:1-13

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When something extraordinary happens, it takes some time to process.

On Monday when Notre-Dame Cathedral caught fire, the news circled the globe in minutes. We all reached for our phones and flipped on TV. Nobody could believe what was happening. We had to see it with our own eyes. In Paris, people streamed to the riverbanks to watch. Like many of you, I stayed glued to news and videos well into the night. I couldn't let it go, I needed to see if anything could possibly survive those flames.

When something incredible happens, there's a kind of processing delay as we try to make sense of things. And when it's something big, a shocking event or inconvenient truth, it's even harder for people to get their minds around. Something like climate change is both so significant and worrisome that people can resort to inventing alternative facts and even conspiracy theories to insulate themselves from what we all must deal with. When basic science is called into question, how can we agree on what is real and true?

Today we do value making our own meaning and speaking our own truths. And sometimes we even get the idea we cannot accept something as real unless we personally have verified it. But of course this has its limits. Because not everything that is true can be easily taken in by human minds and human hearts. There are truths that reach far beyond our natural wisdom. By which I mean, today, there are truths more ancient and everlasting, more amazing and beautiful, than we could ever dare to dream or hope.

Easter is one of these truths.

Easter has never been easy for people to accept. The women who first went to the tomb were not believed. And I'd like to point out, it was not just one woman, or even three -- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. Scripture clearly says there were several women, a whole crowd of female eyewitnesses whose reports were dismissed as idle talk and silly chatter. You see, God considered these women to be worthy witnesses, God trusted them to put together the empty tomb and the angels'

words and their own memories of Jesus saying he would die and rise again someday. God trusted these women to report this world-changing event, but others simply wrote them off. It happens to people who lack social capital or standing. Women, children, people of color, queer people, those outside the power structure are often given true wisdom to speak. But when their message contradicts the status quo, it's brushed away.

Peter insisted on seeing the empty tomb with his own eyes, making his own meaning -- but even when he went there, Peter didn't come to believe. He only went away "amazed." He was left wondering. And later, when several disciples met the risen Jesus in person and even touched him, scripture says "in their joy they were still disbelieving and still wondering" (Lk 24:41). People simply could not grasp the truth of what had happened, even with a miracle staring them in the face.

We can see that from the very beginning their faith was mixed with doubt. And I find that-- very encouraging. Because that's the way you and I often experience Christ's resurrection too.

For some reason we have an easier time accepting the power of death than the power of life. We are depressingly familiar with the forces that sent Jesus to the cross. We know about lies and perverted justice, abuses of power, people who mock beauty and goodness, who order the torture of others. We recognize the terrible things human beings do to each other. But for some reason we are slower to recognize the amazing things God does for all of us. For some reason we are slower to trust in healing and hope and new life and in defiant, resilient, courageous divine love – which is what Easter is all about.

On this Easter morning it is completely understandable and quite all right if we should find ourselves in a place of wondering. We may not know what we think about Jesus being raised from the dead, but that is not a problem. The good news of the universe is in no way limited by how perfectly you or I are able to receive it.

The good news of the universe is this: Today God *has* raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God has defied everything we thought we knew about death's power. God has defeated death itself and put new life in its place.

This Easter morning we stand before a cosmic victory that no human being can ever fully comprehend. Easter is the day for us to just be completely amazed and stunned and wondering and joyful about God's love-- which exceeds every possible expectation.

Some people wonder if we are entering a time when fewer people will believe Christ is risen. I don't know for sure, but it does give us a chance to recognize how astonishing and weird and preposterous it actually is, this crazy talk about God being alive and involved in this world.

As for me personally, I do believe the majesty and mystery of the faith I grew up in. I believe Jesus actually did rise from the dead. A one-time miracle, an amazing event that means new life for everyone. I also recognize that new life often comes to people in ways not stamped with a religious label. Resurrection comes in rebirth after divorce, in recovery from addiction, in healing from disease or a new beginning after a season of loss and grief. In all these ways Christ's resurrection surely is at work, even for people who do not name it this way.

I do believe Jesus rose from the dead, and here's what it means to me. It means God's grace and goodness is the most powerful thing on earth -- in spite of all the daily evidence that would seem to contradict this. It means God is not hands-off or stand-off -- God gets involved with the mess of this world, mixed up in all of it, God gets involved with our pain so that love will always have the final word -- love not hate, life not death. One time long ago God raised someone from the dead. Some people believed it and some did not, and still today people are divided. God does not force this truth on anyone, but still I believe it is truth.

Jesus is risen, and here's what it means to me, personally. When I am down, or losing hope, or going through a confusing time when the way forward is not at all clear, and many things are out of my hands... that's when I lean into resurrection. That's when I give thanks that our Lord has been to hell and back, to bring life and love to every dark place, even my own.

Easter keeps me from giving up. It gives me the commitment to face personal challenges and care for my family, do my job. More than this, Easter motivates me to seek justice for people I don't even know, to work for healing, to speak up more boldly for truth instead of lies, generosity instead of greed, compassion instead of judgment. Easter encourages me to watch for signs of God's goodness and know that God's grace is

always working, always healing, always remaking this world toward justice. When we care for others, when we care for this earth, when we work for what is good and right, we are never acting alone. The Risen Christ is with us.

I knew a guy who lost touch with resurrection. The pain of the world was seeping into his bones. He was becoming... bitter. But something eternal and resilient and good was at work in him. One day he made himself a small promise. Each day he would try to look for one place where God was at work. Just one place where he thought he saw God. He wasn't even sure he'd be able to do it, but he did. He started a little journal. And as he started paying attention, he started seeing God at work. Something small, something big, something here, something there. After a few months, the evidence was overwhelming. He ended up writing a book! And more important, he ended up closer to God. He learned to trust. His hope came back.

I wonder what will happen when we ask God to show us signs of resurrection. Even the smallest signs. When we let Easter's good news work in us a while. Because faith is not a moment of arrival, faith is a process. God is patient. God is good.

And today, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!