

Year C Easter in the Morning Luke 24 1 to 12 Let's Be Amazed

"An idle tale." Jesus is risen back to life – it seemed to the disciples to be an idle tale and they did not believe the excited women who told them the news.

The amazing thing is that this places us in the exact same position as those disciples so long ago. They did not see Jesus walk out of the tomb. The disciples are hearing the message of the resurrection. And that message of the resurrection is being delivered to them by a bunch of excitedly chattering women who, themselves, have just heard the message of the resurrection.

"But Peter got up and ran to the tomb." One of the disciples was curious enough and brave enough – remember, their teacher has just been brutally murdered and they might be next – but one of them emerges from hiding to check things out. One...one disciple...Luke tells us that the women go to the upper room to tell the eleven disciples and the rest of the followers with them. So, there is a bunch of men hiding out and only Peter runs to the tomb to have a look.

I don't know if you noticed or not but, Luke does not tell us that Peter believed once he had seen the empty tomb for himself. Luke writes that Peter went home, amazed with what he had seen. He has seen the empty tomb. He has seen the linen cloths that had been wrapped around his teacher's dead body. Peter is amazed...but awfully quiet. He doesn't go excitedly running back to the rest of the disciples to tell them the women were right. Peter goes home, quietly mulling things over.

Does he believe? Does he believe that Jesus, the Son of Man as he always called himself, has been raised from the dead...raised to new life? Well, we know that the thought was certainly planted in his mind. He was amazed at what he had seen, Luke says. If Peter had thought Jesus' body had simply been moved elsewhere, he would not have been amazed. There is nothing amazing about moving a dead body.

But Peter was amazed...the tomb is empty, the linen cloths are still there, Jesus had told them he would be killed and then raised to new life on the third day...Peter believes...and yet...

This belief runs contrary to logic. It really is “un”believable – someone who was dead is now alive and he said this was going to happen. This is a miracle of the highest magnitude and the implications are earth shattering. Jesus taught them that this was going to happen so that the whole world could then experience the same thing – death was no longer final. The whole world was to be brought back into relationship with God, living with God in his kingdom just like Jesus had said. And, well, that meant the other thing he’d said was true too...He was the Son of God. They had been eating and drinking and hanging out with the Son of God. It’s no wonder that Peter is astounded into silence. Jesus is alive and the implications are mind blowing.

This was unexpected. Yes, sure, Jesus had been teaching them about himself and his purpose for three years. And, yes, Jesus had told them this would happen. But they hadn’t expected it to be true. They had watched the religious and political powers kill their teacher by nailing him to a cross and they’d high-tailed it back to the upper room, afraid they would be the next carcasses dangling from a few nails with rough wood digging into the raw flesh of their freshly whipped backs.

Easter is perplexing, we see today. Belief in the resurrection is difficult. From the beginning, God has challenged us to see the unexpected, the bewildering, and the impossible. God brought the world into existence from out of the void. God parted the waters of a sea to let his people walk through it on dry land into freedom from the world that had been enslaving them. God became flesh and dwelt among us...the unexpected Messiah with an unexpected message. Jesus was not the glorious and mighty Messiah king like other earthly kings. Jesus did not lead his people into battle to overthrow the

oppressive Roman rule. Jesus died. What kind of a mighty king, out to save his people, dies? The one who has an unexpected message does – a message so contrary to the ways of the world it seems impossible, a message of poison to the powerful, a message of relief and joy to the victims of the powerful. It is a message to turn the world upside-down.

According to the rules of human thinking, social classes are created – some people are rich, the others wish they were rich; gender inequality is created, different religions argue about the right way to worship God, nations fight with each other for land and bragging rights, people look with suspicion – even hatred – at those who are not like they are, at those who hold different opinions; fat people are shamed, cultural groups of people are exterminated, the world is polluted, people cheer at movies where “justice” means killing the bad guys. Human thinking lifts up the powerful – the ones with position, property, and padded pocketbooks. Human thinking leads to death and destruction. But this is human thinking that has pushed God aside.

God’s ways are not our ways, and God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, says the prophet Isaiah. Jesus’ message is that they should be. We cannot fully understand God but we do know God’s purpose of complete reconciliation with and among all creation and we can live, think, and be a part of the fulfillment of that purpose. Jesus makes this possible.

The world tends to divide people according to wealth, race, ethnicity, gender, and those who God saves and those who God rejects. The problem is these divisions are often misguided and unfair – based on guidelines that self-proclaimed righteous people have created. Jesus worked to break down the false barriers and to love and include those thought to be discarded by God when, in reality, they were only discarded by fellow humans. Jesus brought healing and wholeness, welcome and friendship, serving in the spirit of humility and equality, loving with a perfect love that brought him to his death on

the cross. These are the ways of God, given to us to live into as a new creation clothed in the perfect love of Christ through the mystery of baptism. Dying with him, rising with him in the new life of God's kingdom here on earth as in heaven.

That new life began with Jesus this day when he was resurrected. It continues across the ages each time the message of his resurrection is proclaimed. The message first given by the angels to the women, the women then giving the message to the disciples, and so on and so on until we hear the message and pass along the message – Jesus has new life and because he does, so do we. Across the centuries, the message of new life brings new life. God is making a new creation, all things are being drawn relentlessly toward the wholeness God intends – God, people, and planet all in right relationship with each other.

Technically speaking, Easter only happens once during the year. But each Sunday is for us a “little Easter”, the joyous celebration of new life on the first day of the week when Jesus first attained new life. And, like ripples in a pond, we share the new life in God's kingdom by living the new life in God's kingdom.

Our story today stops at the amazement of Peter. But the Easter story continues long after this. God continues to challenge the certainty of death with the promise of new life. God has heard all of the arguments against this new life before...people are not raised from the dead...dead is dead...this is impossible...it is an idle tale.

Peter gives us another choice. While the other disciples huddled in disbelief, one curious and courageous disciple chose to visit the tomb and left amazed. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here, he is risen.” Jesus' life gives us new life in God's kingdom now. Let's be amazed.