

Living Christ, Living Faith
[Text - Luke 24:1-12]

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Having been in the “preacher business” in various forms over the past forty-plus years, I’ve noticed that we preachers tend to put a lot of pressure on ourselves for *Easter*. This may be in part, because we know that our words will likely be heard by a larger number of people than usual. [Case in point!] Also, we realize that proclaiming Christ’s Resurrection carries a sacred responsibility - as we try to meaningfully convey the most profound doctrine of our Faith. [No pressure there!] And to top it off, we often try to come-up with a fresh perspective, or a creative new way, to express one of the oldest and most recognizable stories ever told! [How hard could *that* be?]

However, if we in the “preacher business” simply stop and look closely at the Easter story, we may find it reassuring to realize that the first Easter sermon ever preached, basically bombs big time! When the women return from the tomb, proclaiming the wonderful news that Jesus isn’t there, but has *risen* - the initial reaction, is total *disbelief*. To the male disciples, this monumental message sounds like “an idle tale” or “a foolish fable” or “sheer nonsense” [depending on which Bible translation you choose.] Wow! These women present an earthshattering proclamation - “Christ is *risen!*” - only to be summarily dismissed by Christ’s closest followers!

Now, some scholars suggest that this first Easter proclamation is poorly received because the messengers are *women*. And according to Hebrew law and tradition, the testimony of women is not reliable because of the “foolishness and irrational nature of their sex.” [Hey, that’s not *me*, that’s the patriarchal tradition talking!] Yet even if the disciples won’t take their report seriously because of their gender, these women are proclaiming a message that Jesus himself has told those disciples on numerous occasions. He clearly states that his mission of extravagant compassion, inclusion, and forgiveness will likely lead to his own violent death; but that his dying will not be the end! In the end, the Eternal Source of Life will raise him up to a whole new plane of existence! This is what Jesus envisions and believes, and has consistently conveyed to his followers. So you’d think that when the women return from the tomb with the message that Jesus’ vision has come true, the disciples would have been ready and eager to receive and believe that glorious good news. “But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

Perhaps the devastating events of the previous few days have rendered these disciples incapable of accepting that something so positive and life-affirming could come from such a terrible death. Perhaps they, like you and me, need time to let the impact of that amazing proclamation sink-in; maybe the message of Easter is too grand and glorious to be fully absorbed in one dose, or in one day. Fortunately, the remarkable and the *relevant* thing about Easter, is that it is *not* simply a one-day or one-time event! It is an on-going phenomenon that can rise-up before us - or within us - on multiple occasions; even when we least expect it.

The remarkable thing about the Resurrection, is that it isn't just something that happened one morning, centuries ago. When those early believers talk about being "witnesses of the Resurrection", they aren't saying that they witnessed that specific event, in that precise moment of time. As far as we know, there were *no* eye-witnesses to that particular phenomenon. Therefore, a "witness" of the Resurrection can be *anyone* who comes to recognize and to trust that in Jesus Christ, the Holy One's perfect never-ending love is fully personified and affirmed.

The magnificent message of Easter, is that the Divine love which is embodied in Jesus Christ cannot be suppressed, restricted or destroyed! It's been tried before, and will be tried again, but it won't succeed. In spite of being nailed to a cross, despite that heavy stone sealing his tomb, Jesus Christ continues to rise-up and live. For just as Jesus refuses to let the Holy One's abundant love be curtailed or extinguished, so the Holy One's abundant love refuses to let Jesus be conquered by death or confined to a tomb.

Jesus Christ is far too vibrant to be encased in stained-glass; far too complex to be reduced to a set of simple spiritual platitudes. Therefore, for you and me to have faith in the *Living* Christ means that our faith itself must be living and active, growing and evolving. It cannot be frozen in time; or held as a rigid, inflexible theological concept. In and through Jesus Christ, the Holy One displays a living, adaptable, unstoppable love - one that will always find a way to break through the walls that hard-hearted people try to build. It's a love that reaches-out to society's outcast and oppressed, poorest and most vulnerable members; a love that doesn't stop, even when threatened by powerful religious or political leaders. It's a love that takes-on the agonizing pain of personal betrayal and rejection, unfair suffering, and undeserved death; yet it's a love which will not die!

The reason the Easter story is central to our Faith, is that it provides you and me the insight and the inspiration for dealing with Life's most difficult problems and pain, suffering and sorrow. It shows us how we, like Jesus, can boldly live our lives in ways that are gracious and liberating, compassionate and joyful - by trusting that there is nothing that can ever separated us from our loving, Divine Source. And while I'll admit that the story of Easter may at times sound too good to be true, I still believe that it is one of the truest stories ever told:

It's the story of Good ultimately triumphing over evil;
It's the story of how the Sacred Source of Life never gives-up on Creation, or on humankind; It's the story of how people like you and me, when infused with the Spirit of Divine Love, can overcome our deepest doubts and fears and failings.
And perhaps the most awesome thing about the Easter Story, is that when you and I truly embrace it and trust it, live it and share it, it becomes the authentic story of our very own lives!