

We Remember

The Resurrection of Our Lord
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Luke 24: 1-12c

If you've come here this morning with a skeptical mind and lots of questions about this Resurrection business, you're not alone. Conspiracy theorists have always had a field day with Easter. Down through the centuries there have been various and sundry attempts to discredit the story we just heard – some of those attempts are amusing and some are downright outrageous. The "stolen body" hypothesis is perhaps the most popular among the many explanations. This theory supposes that grave robbers tampered with the tomb and moved the corpse of Jesus in the middle of the night. Some suggest the disciples were the robbers to make it appear that this tale of resurrection was true; others maintain it was Pilate in an attempt to squash a movement that was born anyway.

Then there's the "wrong tomb" theory. The women just got turned around in the dark on that first Easter morning. When they come to the wrong tomb in the early a.m., they see a couple of gardeners who say, and this is Biblical, "He is not here." And what these conspiracy theorists say these men really meant to say was, "He's not here, because he's really over there." The women were lost; at the wrong tomb.

Have you heard the "lettuce" theory? Also known by some scholars as the "salad" theory? In this scenario, the gardener gets so ticked off at curiosity seekers trampling through his new lettuce patch that he physically removes the body of Jesus and plants it elsewhere. I'm not making these up. These are bona-fide historical theories that surround the Resurrection of Jesus that are catalogued and explained in a book by Paul L. Maier.

And there's really no time to explain the "rapid decay" hypothesis where in Palestine's hot, muggy climate the body simply decomposed at a rather alarming rate. Or, my personal favorite, the "twin brother" conjecture. You can probably figure out the gist of that one on your own.

I find all of these rather interesting and, at the same time, rather laughable. They each come at Easter from a rational, scientific angle that attempts to enter the tomb with a test tube, if you will. "The facts just don't add up, Mr. Watson, so it can't be true." And presto, the Resurrection is *disproved*.

But there are others, you may have noted, that have entered the tomb through another door, also with a test tube, but their agenda is to try to *prove* the Resurrection. The Shroud of Turin comes easily to mind. "I've got the DNA, dated the carbon-14, Mr. Watson. So Easter, we can all rest assured about this, is really true after all."

But most of us know, don't we, that trying to prove the Resurrection is like trying to prove the existence of God. The truth of Easter, like the truth about the Creator, is not deduced by experiments, no matter how noble or well-intentioned. Resurrection is an

enterprise of faith, and faith, as we shall see in the Easter story from Luke, is about something else entirely which we will discover in a minute.

Something happened in the lives of the first disciples that transformed them from cowardly, frightened, timid followers of Jesus' death to bold, courageous advocates of the Word, who were willing to risk life and limb for this Jesus, as recorded in the testimony of Acts. Most of the disciples, we know, were martyred for the faith. Myths are important and powerful windows to the truth, but myths do not make martyrs. I sincerely doubt that someone would die defending the "salad" theory.

But I want to show you something I discovered in this story before us today that really is the key to faith. And my discovery began with a question: "When does Easter happen for these women in Luke?" They come down the path to do the ritual anointing of the body of Jesus. They see a stone rolled away and even enter an empty tomb. Does that do it for them? That's fairly strong Easter evidence if you ask me. But no, an empty tomb doesn't do it. Luke tells us, "They were perplexed about this." No Easter yet for them.

How about the two men; angels as Luke tells us later? Now that's pretty impressive stuff. I could believe almost anything with angels visiting me. Is this enough to initiate belief in Resurrection? You would think something paranormal like that would do it. But, again, the answer is "no." Luke says they were "terrified," but Easter doesn't happen yet in them.

It's interesting, isn't it? They were right there. They saw the stone rolled away. They saw the empty tomb, the folded grave jammies; they interviewed two angels, but still no Easter. So what caused Easter to happen in the hearts of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the rest?

It's rather simple, really, but extremely profound. The angels don't come at these women with test tubes and various theological hypotheses. They don't try to talk them into Easter at all. "Remember," they say. "Remember how he told you." Verse 8 is the shortest in this story, but on it turns the reality and truth of Easter for these women. *Then they remembered his words.* Right there – Easter happens for these women right there and not a moment sooner. And Easter happens, please note, not because they are intellectually argued into it, nor because they saw things we haven't seen, but because they *remembered*. *They remembered the words of Jesus.* Easter happened then, and not one moment sooner.

What implications does such an Easter story have for modern Christians and seekers like us? Well, frankly, more than we sometimes realize. We tend to want proof, don't we? Or we want it disproved. But what if Easter doesn't happen that way, not just for these women of long ago, but for anybody? What if Easter happens when we remember? As professor Neil Elliott wrote in his commentary on this Easter text:

"We Christians live by story; indeed, we live in the story of God's redemptive work in our world and in our lives. And at the center of our worship is 'remembering' – not just Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper, but the whole of the mighty acts of God. . . We do more than simply recite

events from the hallowed past. Our story-telling is something we do to situate ourselves in the universe claimed by God.”

Then they remembered his words. You see, our forgetting the words does not cancel the reality of the Risen Christ in our world, but it does restrict Easter from happening to and in us.

That’s why we gather like this week in and week out. We gather to remember – to remember the story of old and, in the remembering of the ancient women, to know the Resurrection through them. We gather and remember the baptismal covenant God made with us – God’s promise, God’s Word, to be with us. We are his – bought, named, claimed, and promised eternal life through the Water. We remember and, in our remembering, Easter is born.

We gather and remember in the bread and wine, Christ’s body and blood – offered, poured out, given up for us. We take this nourishment and we remember that in this Godly sacrifice we can know forgiveness of sins and new life. We eat and we drink and we remember.

We gather and remember the empty tomb, and in our remembering, we give thanks for the tombs of our loved ones that are now empty because of Easter. We look in, see the tomb, remember Jesus promise of new life, and Easter is born. And we say thanks be to God for our loved ones who rest within God’s love and care.

We gather and remember Jesus’ Word of promise to send his Spirit to live in and among us. That Spirit keeps Easter alive in us and gives us the faith to believe that in this act of Resurrection we have hope and a future in a Kingdom without disease, pain, illness; a Kingdom without end.

Then they remembered his words. And in our remembering this day, remembering all the ways that Word comes to us, we, like the Easter women, have faith born in us. Happy remembering, my friends in Christ. Happy Easter.

Amen.