

Sermon – “An Idle Tale”

Scripture Readings – Colossians 3:1-4, Luke 24:1-12

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Our first scripture reading is Colossians 3:1-4. In the joyous festival of Easter, Christians proclaim that God triumphs even over death itself. Easter is not a celebration of the renewal of the earth in spring (although this is lovely). Easter is not even a celebration of the astounding event of the resuscitation of an individual (something for which we are grateful). Rather, Easter is the celebration of the faithfulness and the power of God to overcome death. Paul challenges the faithful brothers and sisters of Christ in Colossae to take their cues from the resurrection in the way they live their lives. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

*1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is Luke 24:1-12. Today we read about the discovery of the empty tomb from Luke, the physician’s perspective, mindful that the four gospel accounts differ in details as does the earliest account of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15. Rather than find this troubling we recognize that each speaks and tells of a truth too big and wondrous to fit in a single telling, and we delight in the unique insight of each diverse detail.

We begin this morning where we left off on Friday. The women watched to see where Joseph of Arimathea laid Christ’s body, they returned to prepare spices and ointments, and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

*1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

Title of the sermon: “An Idle Tale”

Let us pray: O Lord, Our God – come to us anew this morning that we may celebrate within our beings the good news of Easter. May the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight, Redeemer God. Amen.

*... but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe.*

It appears we have come full circle with regard to the message of Easter morning. The news the women announced was dismissed, not by those who mocked Jesus on the cross two days earlier, rather by Jesus' closest companions, his disciples. Yes, these are the same friends with whom he shared the Passover meal on Thursday, who could not stay awake in the garden, and who fled following his arrest.

They fled not because they didn't love and respect Jesus... they fled because they were terrified, fragile, uncertain and surely they hated themselves for it. Each of us lives with our own regrets when our response to a given situation falls short of our expectations and so we can identify with the heartache and stomachache these men were feeling the morning the women arrived with the news.

Unfortunately, instead of speaking the truth about their feelings -- they likely were angry at Jesus, their would be Messiah, for being crucified! How could he let them down like this after they gave up three years of their lives following him and believing? What did his words mean anyway? When we are dissatisfied with ourselves, as the disciples surely were on that early morning, we often project our inner angst onto others and blame them for our shortcomings!

Now that we have a feel for the climate within the room, we are not surprised that these eleven could not hear the news that Mary and Joanna had to share. How can we hear any news when we are dissatisfied with ourselves?

And so with closed hearts, they regarded the news as *an idle tale*. The Greek word meaning idle tale occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It was a word used by physicians to describe delirium in deranged patients. It was the silly talk of women and children. The idea of a dying and rising God was absurd, nonsensical, fictitious, impossible! And even if it happened -- they didn't want to hear about it, they were in no mood for good news.

I began this morning with the statement: *It seems we have come full circle with regard to the message of Easter morning*. That which at first seemed to be an *idle tale* because the content was too radically new to comprehend (the dying and rising of God in Jesus of Nazareth) has once again become an *idle tale*.

Today, the concept of a God who could die and rise has become something that is assumed, ordinary, predictable, almost expected, surely taken for granted. We don't even blink an eye when we hear it. How ironic that this *idle tale* -- that is, a story that initially seemed to the eleven a tale that does nothing, is inactive, frivolous and useless has again become useless two millennia after the fact precisely because it is so familiar. We've heard it so many times, our senses have grown dull.

Today's version of Luke's account might be...*but these words seem to us an idle tale, and we continue to believe but our lives remain untouched*. And each one of us in our very presence in this beautiful, historic sanctuary this morning is communicating: *Please touch me. Tell me the story in a way that I can embrace my faith with joy and conviction anew*.

And so this morning I would appeal to the child within each of us. Let us rise above our adult sensibilities and discover anew the child within, who is capable of entering into silly tales, preposterous ideas with delight, wonder and conviction. The fact that God would become a man and then die for all humanity for perpetuity may seem to be a silly, idle tale, but it is the good news

of Easter morning, my friends. Sometimes as adults we get caught up with practicality and proof...the doubting part of our faith gets hung up on the details. Children can believe without having all the facts.

Dr. Robert Coles, child psychiatrist and Professor Emeritus at Harvard University offers us insight into children's spirituality in his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Listen to nine-year-old Mary, with light brown hair, pale blue eyes and freckles so succinctly describe the central belief of Christianity:

*"You mean why Jesus came here and why he died? You see, He was supposed to come, and then He did... and He tried to be a good teacher, and He was a doctor too—He healed people. But then he was killed. He was 'too good for this world'... but He didn't mind dying. He was sad, but He knew He'd live forever, and because He died, we will live forever."*

As the conversation continues and Dr. Coles shares he is not sure what he believes, Mary reveals a side of her contemplative life.

*"I know, it's hard to imagine what will happen after you die. I wonder how we get there, to heaven. I wonder where it is. You can't know for sure. My mom and dad say the one thing we do know is that Jesus did come here, and He did His best for us, and He got killed, and they saw Him; He appeared to them so He'll save us, somehow. But it's not something you can just sit down and say: this is how He'll do it."*

Dr. Coles reflects on their conversation: *"I was touched by Mary's recognition of the impossibility of knowing what she surely wanted very much to know—the practical details, as it were, of how salvation takes place. Yet her impasse did not deter either faith or further speculation."*

*Truly, I tell you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it. Luke 18:17*

The story of Easter Morning - the dying and rising God...an idle tale? I suppose it is for those of us who are too dissatisfied with ourselves to hear the good news. I suppose it is also for those of us who have lost the faith, wonder and delight of the child within. But for the rest of us, the story of Easter morning, the dying and rising God, is no idle tale. We believe the day of resurrection is today. Hallelujah! Amen.