

April 21, 2019  
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Luke 24:1-12 Empty Tombs  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 24:1-12 New Revised Standard Version

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 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. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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.

Have you ever played that game two truths and a lie? It goes like this: Number 1: My husband's nickname for me is CareBear. Number 2: When I was a child I had rainbow colored heart wallpaper in my room. Number 3: When I graduated from college I taught English in North Korea. Which one do you think is the lie? It was really hard for me to come up with a good lie. I tried to make it close to the truth. I did teach English, but in Japan. Have you ever been telling the truth but everyone thinks that you are making it all up? The apostles thought that the women were telling an idle tale about Jesus being raised on that Easter morning. They thought it was a lie that Jesus had risen. They thought that the women were making it all up.

Sometimes I wish the news in our world was all made up. How wonderful if it would be an idle tale that there were terrorist attacks at mosques during Friday Prayer in Christchurch, New Zealand killing fifty people and injuring fifty more. I wish it were all made up. I wish it were an idle tale that the Ethiopian Airlines flight crashed. I wish it were an idle tale that people are losing their jobs, and that so many people are struggling with things they don't deserve. I wish it were an idle tale that there is bigotry in our world, or racism, sexism, homophobia, hatred, and evil. I wish it were all made up.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women came to the tomb that morning with their spices and they expected to find a smelly, dead body. They wished it was all made up that Jesus was dead. They believed that Jesus' body would be in that tomb. Instead, they saw two men in dazzling clothes and they were terrified. They are told that Jesus has risen. The women go to tell the apostles what they have seen. The apostles are hiding, terrified that they will be the next ones killed. They expected fear and death and when they hear the story from the women, they don't believe them. When we are confronted with new life, is our reaction the same? Are we terrified or disbelieving? When hope is right in front of us, do we think it is an idle tale? Do we think it is all made up?

During Lent we have been talking about what we can grow in our lives and what we need to let go of. How can we trust faith and let go of the need for certainty? It starts with getting quiet, and listening for God's voice. When I have to make a decision, I ask everyone around me what they think. It feels shaky and uncertain to listen to my gut but that is God speaking within me. I have to have courage to believe in what I cannot see and the strength to let go of my fear of uncertainty. I have to get very quiet and still. I have to embrace the mystery, the not knowing.

Sometimes I have to say mantras to myself to remind myself to trust faith and let go of my need for certainty. I will say, "God is God and I am not." Or "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Thursday night while we worshipped to remember the night of Jesus' Last

Supper, we heard these words from Psalm 62, “My soul is at rest in God alone, my salvation comes from God. Only God is my rock and my salvation—my stronghold! I will not be shaken. All you people: trust in God at all times! Pour out your hearts before God! God is our refuge!” I think that those need to be words that I say every day!

When we find a glimmer of hope, do we think it is all real or do we think it is all made up? Do we expect new life? When my daughter was about two years old, I took her to every single Easter egg hunt that I could find. I didn’t care if it was at the Baptist church, they had candy to be found! She was a pro. She would pick up the egg, shake it, and then put it in her basket. I was working with her on getting faster so that she could increase the amount of eggs in her basket. This was serious business. Some friends invited us to their house for an Easter lunch, and they had an egg hunt waiting! This was egg hunt number 5, so my two year old knew what to do. She got her basket, picked up the first egg, shook it, and lowered it to her basket, but then this look of confusion came on her face. She lifted the egg up again and shook it. There was no sound. There was nothing shaking around in the egg. There was no sound of a chocolate treat. Our hosts thought that our daughter was so young she wouldn’t understand how this egg hunt thing worked. They had hidden empty eggs. There was nothing inside any of the eggs! I couldn’t believe it. At two my daughter knew that those eggs were supposed to have something in them. Just like the tomb that Easter morning was supposed to have Jesus’ dead, lifeless body.

There might be something in your life that feels hopeless. It might feel empty and you can’t see a way forward. Sometimes we are so discouraged, we don’t even shake the egg because we are convinced that there is only emptiness. We may have even brought spices to cover up the smell. And, then, we see a light in the darkness. We realize that God has brought new life. Will we believe it?

We try so many things to create new life within us. If there is a new gimmick, we try it. If there is a new hairstyle, we are trying it. We take vitamins, we try Keto, we get a new certification because maybe if we change careers then we will be happy. We try something new out, we shake it, and we realize that it is empty. We can’t fix the brokenness in our lives, but God can. We can’t do this ourselves. God has what we need. God is with us always, supporting us, loving us. That is not an idle tale, it is not made up. May our doubts and our fears give way to faith in God.

God is creating something new. Like all of you, it broke my heart to see the pictures of Notre Dame on fire this week. It was a reminder that nothing is permanent, but that with God we can also rise up from anything. With God we can completely recreate ourselves. With God we are not stuck. With God we have choices. With God we can think new thoughts. With God we can learn something new. With God we can create new habits. All that matters is that we see how God is creating something new today and we never look back.

Today is a day when we celebrate that new life is possible. Easter is about giving up control, giving up expectations, giving up our enemies, giving up death, and embracing the new life that God gives us. For some of us that is terrifying, but it is not an idle tale. God is here, God is with us. We might have to break open the empty egg and tell God that we need a new beginning. Today is a day for us to choose hope, it is a day for us to choose new life, and for us to be amazed at what God has done. We live in an Easter world that is being made new. It is a world that belongs to God and that God will never abandon. It is a time for celebration and a day to embrace the mysteries of our faith.

At Notre Dame Cathedral, one of the statues is of Saint Thomas, but the face on that statue is the face of one of the cathedral’s architects. As Notre Dame burned this week, in a way

the image of the cathedral's creator witnessed the death of its creation. Our Creator God witnesses our lives from beginning to end. Our Creator God stands alongside us in our joys, our sorrows, and is with us even unto death. I don't know what resurrection will look like for Notre Dame or for France or Paris or for any of us. We don't have to know yet, but Easter tells us that today is not the end. We sing with our neighbors and we give thanks that the cross still stands. As we sing in Hymn of Promise, "In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity; In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity, In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory, Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see." Thanks be to God, Amen.

Benediction Let us now go forth into the world in peace; being of good courage; holding fast to that which is good; supporting the weak; helping the afflicted; honoring all people; loving God and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.