

C Easter 1 4.17.22

Luke 24:1-12

Focus Statement: The resurrection changes everything.

I'm not one to start a sermon with a joke, but a colleague this week shared a joke about duck church, so bear with me. Well, it's more parable than joke, it's from Soren Kierkegaard, a nineteenth century Danish theologian not exactly known for his humor. It goes like this: "There is a little town of Ducks. Every Sunday the ducks waddle out of their houses and waddle down Main Street to their church. They waddle into the sanctuary and squat in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and takes its place, then the duck minister comes forward and opens the duck Bible (Ducks, like all other creatures on earth, seem to have their own special version of the Scriptures.) He reads to them: "Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you! No fences can hold you! You have wings. God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds!" All the ducks shout "Amen!" And they all waddle home."

Easter Sunday is not unlike Duck Church. Here we are, waddling in, squatting in our proper pews, choir assembled, duck Bible open. Christ is Risen! I shout. You respond, "*Christ is Risen, Indeed.*" And then we all waddle home, to ham or bunny cake or donuts, and our normal lives. Easter is a great day, but it's just a day, like any other. What difference does it really make?

Honestly, the same question could be asked of the disciples in our Gospel text for this morning. We know Easter made a difference to them, because we know the rest of the

story. We know about the walk to Emmaus, the breakfast on the beach, the ascension, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. But what if we didn't. What if our knowledge, like the disciples, stopped where our text stopped this morning, with the women's audacious claims of an empty tomb and dazzling messengers pronouncing, "He is not here, but he is risen. Remember what he told you..." Even Peter, who goes so far as to look at the tomb himself, simply came back home. "Amazed at what had happened," sure, but still, just back home.

And here let me insert just a little bit of misplaced rage I felt at this final detail of the story. I'd always given Peter some credit here. The others just dismissed the women out of hand, Peter at least went to look. But this year I felt differently, for whatever reason. Like, come on dude, why do you have to go look for yourself. Believe women when they tell you stuff! And here you all prove once again to be much better people than me, as Joyce very kindly pointed out during Bible chat, isn't this what we all do when faced with something unexpected, we look for ourselves. To which I had to admit, I do. Co-op comes to me and says something's leaking, I go and look. My justification is I need to know what it is so I know who to call, but the real reason is I'm hoping to prove them wrong, like if I look nothing will actually be leaking. This, fun fact, never the case. Believe Woman's Co-op. But still, I look. And that something somewhere in this building is leaking is a way less far-fetched claim than someone has risen from the dead. Of course Peter had to go see for himself.

He looked, he saw, he went home. The women saw, told the others, no one believed them. Here's the part about Easter that we miss in the fanfare, dear people of God. The resurrection happened, and those who first witnessed it weren't sure what to do with this information. Resurrection faith didn't come with the resurrection. It came later, with interactions with the Risen Christ, with fellowship, with meals, with the coming of the Spirit. Resurrection faith happened, to the disciples, to the women, to the world, but it took time. Time to shake off the grief of Good Friday. Time to get past the shock of the empty tomb. Time to realize that a new world wasn't only possible, it was unfolding before their very eyes.

It took time and it took imagination. Imagination and faith to envision a world vastly different than the one they were living in. We're going to be reading Acts throughout the Easter season, and in Acts you won't find a world where everyone from the leper to the Roman soldier came together to sing alleluia and break bread. You'll find a world, a church, still very much in struggle. Stephen will be martyred while Paul, who eventually became an apostle but started as Saul the Zealot, watched. And even after he became an apostle, he and Peter will fight endlessly about everything. The Corinthians will get in squabbles about who gets to come to the table. Let's not get started on the Galatians. Eventually Constantine took over, and the church got real Imperial. There were the dark ages, the Great Schism, the Crusades. Luther wrote some really awful things, things that got used to justify the Holocaust. Honestly, dear people, the resurrection took imagination and faith then, and it takes imagination and faith now, to envision a kingdom of God in this mess of today. Of war and disease and ism upon ism.

But that, dear God is precisely what the story of this day asks of us. To stare at an impossible scene and imagine something different, something better. Something we've been told but cannot quite picture, something just beyond our grasp.

Dear people of God, this seems an impossible ask, but here's the thing. We see glimpses of it, if we know what to look for, glimpses of the impossible becoming possible, of the resurrection unfolding, of new life where none should flourish. And so the trick is to take these pieces of the story and let them push us into bigger dreams, bigger possibilities, bigger ideas of what could be possible, what God might be up to, in the slow unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Here's an example of how I've seen it. There's a piece one of the Painted Chair Affair artists is making for the event that she found abandoned, set out on the side of the road for trash day. Battered, beaten, abandoned, just waiting for Republic to haul it to the dump. Kathy saw potential in it, took it home, sanded it, repainted it, gave it purpose and vision and beauty. From overlooked curb garbage to an art piece that will certainly bring in hundreds of dollars for the Woman's Co-op.

An even better example is the Co-op itself. How many people would have told Teresa, did tell Teresa, that a bunch of women living in Triangle would never amount to anything. And yet here they are coming up on twenty years later, transforming lives day in and day out. I think Teresa would be the first to tell you that it takes a lot of imagination still, and patience, to see a different future. No one walks into Co-op one day and walks out with a steady job, stable housing, a savings account, and a delightful and sunny demeanor.

Transformation takes time. A lot of time. And you can think you've done it, think you've transformed, and find yourself right back in the same hole again, or in a completely different hole you'd never even imagined from the bottom of the other one. And yet, inexplicably, a different world is being built, one day at a time, before our very eyes.

Dear people of God, real talk here. The resurrection makes no sense to me. People don't come back from the dead. I can wrap my head around the incarnation ok, sure God became flesh and walked around with us. But that God would then die and rise again and ascend into heaven and leave behind a world that looks like this. I'm a pastor. I have a piece of paper that literally says on it that I have mastered divinity, and the resurrection is a lot. Believing that God has redeemed this, it's a lot.

It's a lot. I don't understand it. I don't have logical proof or explanation of it. But I believe it. I believe it because the promise of resurrection is the only thing I can hope in, the only potential I can find in a world so big and hard and scary. I believe it like a drowning person clinging to a life vest, like an oasis in the desert, like an outstretched hand pulling me back from the edge. I believe because I have to think, to pull from the prophet Isaiah, that "the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear," that God is "mak[ing] a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert," that one day "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Trust, faith, belief, imagination, whatever you want to call it, that this is possible, is the only thing that keeps me working for such an unbelievable future. In a world of violence, disease, climate crisis, and every kind of ism, it is

resurrection imagination that keeps me believing that my work can matter, that I can make some sort of a difference in the world. And that belief maybe changes the world a little bit, I hope. But I know it changes me. I know because I've experienced that change. And I know many of you have too.

In his book, *Struggling with Scripture*, Frederick Buechner writes, "'I understand imagination to be the capacity to entertain images of reality that are out beyond the evident givens of observable experience. That is, imagination is the hosting of "otherwise" ... When we do such hosting, however, we must, of course, take risks and act daringly to push beyond what is known to that which is hoped and trusted but not yet in hand."

So, dear duck church. Waddle out of here today, as you waddled in. You don't have to fly home. Peter can convert thousands with a word, but he had the Holy Spirit descending on him in a tongue of fire, I have two semesters taught by Bishop Satterlee. Waddle out of here, but as you do, stretch your wings a little bit. Wiggle them about, see how they feel. Imagine what it might feel like to fly. Thanks be to God. Amen.