

A Time to Remember  
A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Wm. D. Peterson  
Coeur d'Alene First Presbyterian Church  
Easter Sunday  
04/04/10

Text: Luke 24:1-12

NRSV

<sup>1</sup> But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, *they* came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> *They* found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when *they* went in they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup> While *they* were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?" <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> *Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.* <sup>11</sup> But these words seemed to them like an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> 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.

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The Sermon

In the movie *Cast Away*, there is a gripping portrayal of just how disruptive it is to have someone suddenly turn up alive, when everyone who loved and cared for him had reconciled themselves to his death, and had moved on with their lives.

It is not that they weren't thrilled that he had somehow survived for several years during which they'd heard or found nothing to indicate his survival of a mid-ocean plane crash -- it is simply that his return was, quite frankly, *complicating*.

However, to the viewer of *Cast Away*, it is perfectly clear what has happened to this survivor. We've vicariously experienced the plane crash, and the character's transformation from an upper middle class manager in *Federal Express*, to a savvy primitive on a remote island with absolutely no human -- or even animal -- companionship.

We've observed his body morph from soft and flabby to hard and lean. We've observed his fierce struggle to hold onto hope for a love relationship through a picture that survived the crash and water. We've observed the means he's used to keep a grasp upon sanity, and shared in the plans he's made to try to escape from his isolation.

Then we've watched his re-emergence as a modern man. Shaved, tan, looking fit in contemporary clothing. But we've also heard a trusted colleague from *Federal Express* tell him not to expect things to be the same when they arrived back in the U.S. The survivor's friend says,

*"We thought you were dead for all these years, so you can't expect us to instantly readjust to your presence in our midst."*

How true.

Anyone who has gone through illnesses or accidents that bring them to near-death, and who expect to die, has learned that sometimes it is more complicating to realize you are going to have to accommodate the continuing – or new – realities of your life, than to have prepared for the finality of death.

Anyone who has been a primary caregiver, or close family member or friend of someone whose precarious health or self-harming habits have brought them near-death on more than one occasion, only to rebound and experience new vitality at the most – or extended life at the least – knows how exhausting it can be to brace oneself for this person's death, and then to have to come to grips with the reality that you now have to brace yourself for the truth that this is not the last time you'll be taken through the "Valley of the Shadow."

And, what do these reflections have to do with Easter Sunday morning 2010?

Quite a bit, actually, because in each of the Gospel stories, we read through the lenses of first-century story-telling styles, that the followers of Jesus – those who had given up the rhythms and certainties of their daily lives and occupations to accompany him – and who were just beginning to cope with Jesus' dramatic, unfair, and unjust arrest, trial in a kangaroo court, and brutal punishment and torture through death on a Roman cross, now had to radically reorient themselves to Jesus' renewed presence in their lives – a presence unlike any in human history.

These sometimes faithful and often not-so-faithful disciples (in other words people a lot like us), had none of the benefits of modern cinematic technique to observe their companion and leader's transformation from a physical living, breathing, daily presence – the BEFORE in this case – into a spiritual presence, a presence that was no longer bound by space and time – the new though mysterious AFTER.

However mysterious, they nevertheless each, in her or his own way, came to acknowledge that for them Jesus had not left them permanently -- *not really!*

Each evangelist who wrote about the resurrection in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had his own way of recounting when, and how, and where, and when the Risen Christ was in their midst. Each of those accounts is fascinating, and deserves our attention, but it is not what makes for a vital faith that can sustain Jesus' followers to and including this day, and this congregation, gathered together to worship and partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper on April 4<sup>th</sup>, in the Year of Our Lord 2010.

So what is it that contributes to our faithfulness to these many centuries after the Lord Jesus' death – and His being raised by God– today; and tomorrow; and as long as we are given life and breath?

It appears in many ways to be the same things that helped the baffled – yet thrilled – women at the empty tomb, and disciples who walked here and there, and met here and there, and cowered behind closed doors only later to boldly proclaim the GOOD NEWS.

And those things have to do with ***remembering***.

Those early disciples and followers found that when they

- *remembered* Jesus' words;
- *broke bread together in his name*;

- invited him to be present *in their midst*;
- behaved as he had behaved by offering hospitality, touching the untouchables, eating with outcasts and sinners, sharing their food and possessions with the poor, worshipping together *in his name*, and so on and so forth;

Jesus as the living Christ, was a reality they couldn't deny.

So let's go back to some of the thoughts shared earlier in this sermon.

Death -- even an out-of-season death -- and cremation, or burial, are *physical* phenomena that occur to all human beings at some points in their lives.

Jesus' female followers -- and it was indeed females in each of the Gospel accounts were, understandably, absolutely devastated by his death. How could they be anything but?

As devastated as they were, however, these female followers could cope with the tragedy, and return to more or less characteristic lives of females in that day, if they simply had the opportunity to do what women did back in those times, namely prepare the body with spices.

Unpleasant work indeed that had not been possible immediately after Jesus' death due to the impending Sabbath, but work they were accustomed to doing.

Death they were used to. No one anticipated resurrection, and none of the Gospels try to explain it, really.

Even had there been video cameras and a film crew standing by Jesus' tomb I doubt that anything natural would have been recorded because ***resurrection is not natural business -- it is supernatural.***

***Jesus didn't "do something" to rise from the dead; but that God "did something transformative".*** It's a divine mystery exactly what that *something* was, and I would be unfaithful to the Gospels if I tried to explain it to you.

In fact, as one commentator wrote: "Was the stone rolled away so that Jesus could get *out* of the tomb, or so that the women could get *in*?" Fascinating question, isn't it?

I would advise you further that if anyone tries to give a scientific or "natural" explanation of what happened that first Easter Sunday morning, recognize that they have moved out of the realm of science and natural history into the realm of sheer speculation.

But what is not sheer speculation is that through God's transforming power, the flesh and blood Jesus whom the earliest disciples had walked with and talked with, was no longer bound by time and space. Instead of *mourning for a dead Jesus*, the disciples found themselves being *transforming through the presence of a living Christ*.

And that transformation has continued across the centuries as people who have never previously heard of -- or believed in -- Jesus Christ were introduced to his saving presence in their midst.

That transformation has continued among others of us who at times thought we'd given up on *God as being in Christ*, especially in our college or young adult years when we learned the scientific principles of cause and effect. Among those who thought we could just give up on the Easter story -- myself included -- there were those who learned we couldn't escape the grip of the Risen Christ, when we experienced its reality in the transformed lives

of other believers.

Just as God was at work in emptying the tomb and making it possible for the earliest disciples to communicate with the Risen Christ, God continues to be at work in the mystery that enables Christ to be as present in our worship, and in our sharing of the sacraments today, in ways similar or somewhat different from the ways he was in those days.

Further, we don't simply have to swallow hard, and take the reality of the Living Christ, by blind faith; we have the history of 2000 years of faithful memory and tradition; we have the Scriptures; and we have our own experiences of new life in Christ.

So let's share in the table. Let's celebrate the mystery. Let's be grateful that we have the privilege of *seeing Christ* in others -- and even on occasion *being Christ* to each other -- and let's do what those women of faith did that first Easter morning; let's remember what Jesus said, and did, and how he lived his life, and then go tell others of what we learn, even if they think it an idle tale.

Thanks be to God. Amen.