

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women went 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; He 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.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 24:1-12

04/20/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"He Is Not Here; He Is Risen"

Rev. Amy Terhune

One of my favorite stories is told by the Rev. Tom Long, who relates a story from John Updike about Rev. Clint Tidwell, now retired. At one of Clint's appointments, he had a member of his congregation, who was into his early 80s by that point, but was still the owner and very-active editor of the local newspaper. This was both a blessing and a curse. The blessing part was that this old journalist believed Tidwell to be one of the finest preachers ever to walk the planet, and, wishing the whole town to benefit from this homiletical wisdom, he published a summary of Tidwell's Sunday sermon every Monday morning in the paper. The curse part was that this newspaperman, though well meaning, was a bit on the dotty and eccentric side, and Tidwell was often astonished to read the synopses of his sermons. The man owned the newspaper; nobody else would dare edit his columns, and the difference between what Tidwell thought he said and what the editor heard Tidwell say was often a source of profound amazement and sometimes embarrassment.

Well, one Easter Monday morning, Tidwell, in his bathrobe and slippers, padded out the carport door to retrieve the Monday newspaper. The paper was lying at the end of the driveway, and, as Tidwell approached, he could see that the morning headline was in "second coming" sized type. What could it be? he wondered. War? A stock market crash? An assassination or terrorist attack? As he drew close enough to focus on the headline, he was startled to read the words, "Tidwell Claims Jesus Christ Rose From The Dead." A red flush crept up Tidwell's neck. Well of course he had claimed in yesterday's sermon that Christ rose from the dead! It was Easter, after all! I mean, you're supposed to say that on Easter, aren't you? That's the theme of the day, but still, he found himself wondering, "what will the neighbors think". [from John Updike, *A Month Of Sundays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), pp. 197-198; as adapted from "Running Around The Empty Tomb" by Thomas G. Long, www.Sermons.com.] But I guess I don't share Tidwell's angst about it. This is a rare moment where the editor got the headline absolutely right. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This is still the life-altering, world transforming Good News that

it was 2000 years ago, but far too many of us treat it like old news. Can I say anything today that hasn't already been said by countless preachers across the centuries? No. No, I cannot. Can you experience resurrection today in such a way that it transforms your thinking, alters your perspective, re-energizes your life, or reveals new insight on your purpose in life? Yes. Absolutely. And that's why you're here, isn't it? Something about this day speaks to the deepest parts of who we are; the best parts of who we are. Easter is the heart of our identity as followers of Jesus Christ. We are Easter people – people of hope; people who see possibilities where others see dead ends; people who see life abundant and beauty and life in the harshest circumstances; believe who refuse to accept the depravity of human nature on display in the news but live in faith that God can, and is, and will remake humankind and human systems in ways that lead to the fullness of life, thriving with love, grace, justice, and peace.

We pause this morning to remember – to let this day impact us – to let the significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus does awe us again.

Though, to be fair, the scripture doesn't begin with awe. Let's set the scene a bit: The women have watched the whole gory thing. They've seen Jesus tried for blasphemy. They've seen the crowd that shouted hosanna turn against him and cry for crucifixion instead, and they've seen Pilate cave to the crowd's demands even though he knows Jesus isn't guilty of a crime. They've seen him beaten, mocked, and tortured. They've followed him as he carries his cross toward Golgotha; as he stumbles and falls under its weight time and again; as soldiers finally make some poor guy coming in from the countryside carry the cross for Jesus just because they can. They follow weeping and probably sickened by how quickly things have gone wrong. They watch 12-inch stakes pounded through his wrists and the arches of his feet. They stood there while he slowly suffocated to death in front of them, saw a soldier stab him in this side, saw Joseph of Arimathea take the body and lay it in a tomb. Then they return to the upper room and prepare spices and ointments for his burial. And the next day, the Sabbath day, Luke reports that they rested according to the commandment.

That intrigues me. Somehow, I doubt they rested. I have no doubt that they observed the Sabbath, followed the rules, didn't work or do things they're not supposed to, but knowing what they saw, what they felt, what kind of thoughts and emotions had to be careening through their minds and bodies, I can't image that they experienced anything like true rest. I imagine them full of "what ifs" and "if onlys". I imagine them weeping so hard that their bones ached. I know how grief feels. I imagine them laying awake in the dark until they just can't bear another second, and in the early dawn, or deep dawn, while it's still dark, they head to the tomb to show love for their Lord in the only way left to them – to care for his corpse.

When they get there, the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. Luke reports that the women were perplexed about this. Well, no kidding! Perplexed? That's the word we're going to use? Perplexed? I looked at some other translations. Some say "puzzled" or "bewildered" or "befuddled". Really? How about agonized? Anguished? Beleaguered? A state compounded by the sudden appearance of two dudes in dazzling white clothes who have the audacity to ask why they're looking for the living among the dead. No matter how many times I read this passage, that question fascinates me. The obvious answer to it is that they weren't looking for the living. They were looking for one who's dead! Given all they've seen, it's a logical place to look, quite frankly. Why do you look for the living among the dead? I've said this before, there really is a little part of me that always wants to say to those angels: um...duh!

It hardly seems fair to ask these women such a question. And yet, it changes their sight, doesn't it? They remembered what Jesus has said. And they turned and left the tomb behind. Whatever doubts they had, and scripture reports that many of the first followers of Christ had their doubts, these women told their story – the told it even when they weren't believed. They told it even when Peter

couldn't get past amazement over what had happened, when Thomas refused to hear, when the others shook their heads in bewilderment at such idle gossip. They told the story.

And today, I tell it. I believe it. I believe the Resurrection is a historical reality. The tomb was empty, and a heart that had gone silent took to beating once more. I believe that with every fiber of my being. But let me hasten to add that if we consign this day to a historical once upon a time, then we do ourselves and our world a great disservice. Resurrection is also a present reality. It is a powerful statement about how God works in our lives and our world now! So, I let that angel press me, too: Why do you look for the living among the dead? And I consider that maybe, just maybe, that's not so much a question as a mandate. As in: Hey – look for the living among the dead.

I love the scene in 'The Return of the King', which is the third movie in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, where an injured princess name Arwyn stands looking out over the city of Minas Tirith. It's a gray day and she knows that somewhere beyond her horizon, troops are marching into battle. Standing beside her is Faramir, the younger prince of Gondor, and so she says to him, "The city has fallen silent. There's no warmth left in the sun. It grows so cold." And he smiles and shrugs and says, "It's just the damp of the first spring rains." She looks at him incredulously, and he says, "I do not believe this darkness will endure." There's an Easter heart that beats. He has learned to see life in what appears to be dead.

I don't know what it is about some modern folks that get so squeamish about the miracle of this day. Friends, if we gather here today, sing our hymns, pray our prayers, share the worship experience, but never dare to imagine that God might occasionally buck the rules of nature and time, never dare to explore the possibility that some things can't be explained, never dare to expect that God is moving, acting, working, then why are we here? Do we really want to go through life believing we're limited by the sins that cripple us? Do we really want to go through life believing death is all there is, that the energy of our life isn't good for anything more than making the grass on our graves a little greener? Resurrection cannot be left in the dim recesses of time. Its power lies in its applicability to our time. It isn't the epilogue happy ending to a once-upon-a-time story. It is the quintessential reality by which you and I live our faith in today's world. It is so important that the power of what happened this day last beyond today. The world needs people who will come to the problems and challenges we face with resurrection eyes—eyes that expect to see possibilities, opportunities, and solutions. So if Easter isn't headline news on Monday, then we've missed it.

Tidwell Claims Jesus Christ Rose From The Dead! Now that I think about it, that headline needs to be tweaked. The ancient greeting, which the church has used from its earliest days, goes like this: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed. It's not "Christ rose". It's "Christ is risen". Now. Today. Christ is risen. Why do you look for the living among the dead? Because 2000 years ago, a group of women went looking for a corpse, and found a resurrected Lord! It was God's way then, and it is God's way now.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Now go and live it! Amen.