

Luke 24:1-12 Easter 4/04/10 Pastor Bill Uetricht

It has been a horrible week. It seemed to start in a good way. It began with this parade, this parade into Jerusalem. There were big crowds. Our friend and our great hope, Jesus, led the parade into Jerusalem. I mean, honestly, you never knew what to expect from him. He never did things in a normal kind of way. He came riding into Jerusalem on a colt. In some ways it was a bit funny. The big wigs normally would be brought into the holy city on some kind of impressive chariot. They would have been lifted up high for everybody to see them. Oh not Jesus! You get this sense that maybe he was making fun of all of those big wigs. As he came into the city he was welcomed with great applause. People placed their coats on the road out in front of him. They were all excited. I mean, he was really popular. I guess his teachings were beginning to really catch on. The crowds were crying out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven."

Expectations were really high. Just maybe happy days were here again.

Then Jesus started to put a little damper on the day. He wept over our holy city. And then he said that this city just couldn't ever recognize the things that make for peace. Isaiah had said that God was getting ready to create Jerusalem as a joy, its people as a delight. And Jesus said that our city was the killer of those who came to speak on behalf of God. And then he went into the temple and drove out those who were selling the animals for the temple sacrifices.

We knew that things were not good then. We knew that our friend and our hope for the future was not facing a good future himself. The religious leaders began to plot to do away with Jesus. And still, in the midst of this drama, Jesus called together his friends and shared a

Passover meal with them. That night he took a couple of the elements of that meal and interpreted them in a strange kind of way. He said that the bread was his body and the wine was his blood. What? Was he about ready to die? It seemed like the kind of thing that a dying person might say. And then quickly, one of our friends and his friends, Judas, betrayed us and him and turned Jesus into the authorities. At this point everything fell apart. The Jewish authorities and the Roman leaders put our friend to death. They crucified him. It was awful. It was shameful.

We guessed that Jesus must have been wrong, wrong about what he thought God wanted from humanity, wrong in hanging out with the wrong kind of people, wrong in all of those outrageous teachings about turning the other cheek and forgiving the enemy, wrong in believing that God's new and great future had broken into life as we knew it.

It was all very deeply depressing. Early Sunday morning we went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. It's just what good friends do. Honestly, we didn't know what to do. What else could we do but visit his grave, care for his body? You know what? When we went inside his tomb his body was gone. We were terrified. What had happened to his body? It was bad enough that he was dead. Now someone has stolen his body. A couple of men, maybe they were angels, asked us a strange question, "Why were we seeking the living among the dead?" Why were we looking for a reality that was alive in the place where you would only find dead things, dead bodies? He is not here, they told us. He is risen! Ahh! Then we remembered what we had forgotten. We remembered that he had told us that he would be crucified and then be raised on the third day. His death was not a random event engineered by the practitioners of randomness, the religious and political leaders who wanted to do away with the radically new. No, his death was a

part of the big story of God. It was a part of what true love means for the whole of history. And God raised the one who died. In other words, God vindicated Jesus. What he taught is indeed true. What he represented, what he ushered in, what he lived and died for is not dead. He is alive, and so is his reign, his dream for the world.

(Move to the pulpit) Friends, a group of women came to the tomb expecting to discover death. And surprise of all surprises, life discovered them. “He is not here; He is risen” is news that puts everything in perspective. The world tried to put love to death. The world tried to extinguish the dream. The world tried to do away with the one who embraced the forgotten, brought good news to the poor, forgave sinners, welcomed outcasts, ushered in an entirely new world, but God would have nothing of the sort. For you see, Jesus was right about what God wants from humanity, what God desires for God’s world. As Jesus was raised from the dead, so, too, was the dream of God for God’s world.

“He is not here; he is risen” is news of a big hope. Today, folks, we gather to remember not a puny hope, a hope for your private soul or my private soul. No, we gather to remember a hope for all that is, a hope rooted in God’s dream for the world, a dream that Jesus lived. Paul describes Jesus’ resurrection as the first gift that anticipates more and greater gifts. He says that Christ is the first to be raised from the dead. Then we will be raised. Then will come the end when every enemy is put under the feet of Christ. And the last enemy to be destroyed, according to Paul, is death. The resurrection of Jesus anticipates that time when death will be no more, that is to say, when life is as it ought to be, when what God desires for the world becomes what is true always.

Isaiah tells us that this is a matter of God creating new heavens and a new earth. This is a matter of God eliminating the sound of weeping on our streets. This is a matter of God doing away with the pain that comes to parents because they have lost a child who lived only but a few days or who grew up only to face calamity. This is a matter of all of God's people living a long and full life. This is a matter of all of God's people being able to share in the bounty of God, of God doing away with poverty and oppression. This is a matter of God making our work an experience of joy, not an exercise in futility. This is a matter of violence being eliminated. The wolf and the lamb that normally battle each other for their very lives are feeding together. The lion that normally is a big time carnivore has become a vegetarian. The world, reflecting God's desire for it, has become a peaceable kingdom.

"He is not here; he is risen" is news of a big hope for all that is. I wonder what that big hope might mean for the way we live now. This is not an idle tale for the delirious among us. If Jesus, the one who was crucified for embracing the forgotten, forgiving the sinners, loving the broken is alive, then how shall we live now? It's obvious. We will include, not exclude. We will forgive and we will love, especially those who have been hurt by life or who have hurt it.

If the resurrection of Christ anticipates the day when death will be no more, when violence no longer invades our streets, when the wolf and lamb are feeding together, then how shall we live now? We will practice peace. We will refuse to allow death to speak the final word. We will trust life even as we travel to the cemeteries of our lives. We will remember even as we go to the graves that he is not here; he is risen. **Everything** has been changed.