

“Curious “And” Wondering”

Luke 24:1-53

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Open up our minds that the mystery and joy of Easter might feel within reach. Open up our hearts that we might believe the unbelievable. And like Peter, in this hearing, may we move closer to you. God of the empty tomb, we are hungry for your good news. Speak to us now. With hope in our hearts we listen and we pray, amen.

The Easter Sunday sermon is the most daunting. There is no way mere words can even come close to communicating the glorious mystery of Easter. So let us begin with more prayer, so the Holy Spirit can fill us with Easter. God of today and tomorrow, God of the garden and the tomb, God of our faith and our doubt, we are running towards you.

Like Peter on that Easter morning, we simply cannot stay away. So with beating hearts and wide eyes, we have arrived in this sanctuary, bringing with us questions, hopes, joys, and concerns. God of the dawn, we start with our hopes: Thank you for the gifts of this world that instills buoyancy in us. Thank you for the curiosity of children, for the sound of your people singing in unison, for crowded tables and neighborly kindness,

for the sun after the rain, the spring after the frost, love after loss, and faith after doubt.

Like Peter, we have countless reasons to hold onto hope. Highest among them is the joy and promise of this day. Thank you for these holy breadcrumbs on the journey of faith. However, before we found ourselves in the garden, before the joy and the alleluias of this day, we found ourselves at the foot of the cross. So for the things that erode our hope, for the things that stitch doubt and fear into our hearts, we ask for your comforting hand.

Wrap your arms around all who are still locked in that upper room. Wrap your arms around all who cannot find healing after their longest night. Wrap your arms around all who look for reasons to hope, but cannot find those breadcrumbs amidst reasons to grieve. Holy God, like Peter, fan the flames of our faith. Like Peter, invite us to step out of our boats. And like Peter, use us to care for those in need, to tell your story, and to build a more loving world. We remember, and we believe. So with awe-struck, wildly-beating, grateful hearts, we run toward you. With feet in the garden and eyes on the cross, we celebrate this glorious and mysterious Easter day. Amen

We might expect that, after denying Christ, Peter would cower in shame—or perhaps even run away in an attempt to leave his past behind him. Instead, when Peter hears the news from the women, Peter doesn't dismiss them like the other disciples. Peter gets up and runs to the tomb. When Peter peers into the empty tomb and sees the linen cloth, he is filled with awe, wonder, and curiosity. Even after the biggest failures, even after the worst case scenario has happened, can we run toward hope? Like Peter, will we keep going? Will we keep looking for God in our midst?

Luke 24:1-12 NLT “Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here! Jesus is risen from the dead! Remember what Jesus told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.” Then they remembered that Jesus had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, Peter peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.”

Easter is an unfinished sentence with ellipses. For there is always a glorious resurrection in our future. And I hope... we might imagine Peter hearing the women's testimony then uttering these words under his breath, his voice trailing off in the distance as he dashes to the tomb to see for himself. Peter shows us a “both/and” faith that persists even after mountain peaks and deep valleys. Peter failed. Peter sunk. Peter misunderstood. Peter drew his sword. Peter denied Christ three times. Peter was not there when Jesus died. And

Peter ran to the tomb. Peter shows us that we can always begin again. We can add an “and” when we think our stories have come to an end. Does Peter run to the tomb because he believes or because he doubts? It doesn’t matter why Peter goes—for the tenacity of hope drives him there. Once Peter sees the linen cloths on the ground, he safely arrives back home, filled with amazement, wonder, and curiosity. Easter is an “and.” We will endure plenty of suffering “and” resurrection always triumphs. You, and all people, will enjoy eternal “ands.” Life, love, shalom, joy will expand for eternity. You will expand for eternity for your life is eternal and you will always experience ever growing love, shalom, and joy.

Life can be brutal. Most of us reach moments of despair like the rest of the disciples when they think resurrection is nonsense. The translation of the Greek is nonsense, an idle tale, foolish talk, garbage, a bunch of rubbish. I have had these moments when my heart believes in resurrection, but my mind says it’s nonsense. These are the moments when my family, friends, the church, are vital to keep assuring me of resurrection.

Easter, resurrection, is nonsense. There is honesty in this reaction. The good news frequently seems too good to be true. God’s redeeming grace freely offered to all people, all being forgiven, seems like nonsense. All people living in harmony, in peace in one world-wide community celebrating diversity, appreciating differences and one in love, seems like rubbish. Every relationship being “life enhancing,” seems like an idle tale. No fear, no hate, no violence, seems like foolish talk. The end of all suffering, disease and all that diminishes life, seems like a bunch of rubbish. All that is broken being made whole, seems like garbage. Every person having goodness for they are created in God’s image and are a member of God’s family, our eternal sibling, seems like an idle tale. God’s love being all encompassing to redeem everyone, even fallen angels and the devil, seems like foolish talk. Grace that assures everyone that they are enough, that no works, no faith, no belief, no anything, is required for God’s grace to welcome everyone home, seems too good to be true. Every aspect of the cosmos being in loving, joyful harmonious relationship, seems like a bunch of rubbish. Every one of your tears wiped away, every hurt soothed, every negative thought banished, every aching feeling transformed to joy, every loss recovered, every failure made a success, every pure wish fulfilled, seems like an idle tale. The truth that life always follows every form of death seems like nonsense. The tomb is empty. Death is a portal to glorious life. Jesus is resurrected. And much more. Peter was thinking about how Jesus healed people, welcomed outcasts, ate with the rejected, fed people, united people, forgave everyone, declared outsiders from different religions were included in God’s all-inclusive family. Jesus taught about the magnificent, spectacular glorious coming Kingdom of God. “Could it all really be true?” is the question Peter probably asked himself with hope on his heels as he ran to the tomb to see for himself. Peter goes home wondering and curious. It is in that wondering and curiosity that resurrection can be glimpsed. The resurrection only makes sense when we remain amazed, curious and wondering at the love of God that reversed death. We do not need to be able explain resurrection to celebrate the glory of Easter and our coming changed, redeemed resurrected cosmos and life. Our glimpses of resurrection rarely come from cerebral understanding, rather our ability to embrace awe and let the Holy Spirit transform us from the soul, to our heart, to our mind, to our being, to our actions. This Easter how can you be like Peter exploring, curious and wondering what is happening? When you think your story has come to an end Easter declares there is always an “and” coming. All that is good that dies or ends or is lost will be resurrected. All goodness is resurrected, and you will enjoy all goodness again and the cosmos’ goodness and for eternity.

“Easter Morning”

a poem by Sarah Speed

I cannot stay away on Easter Morning.

Like Peter, I would run if I could.

Stop the car, pump my arms, take the church steps two at a time, all to know—

Did it happen?

Did it really happen?

Is evil no match for love?

I’d slide down the center aisle.

I’d grab the mic to ask the angels, the heavens, the children, Were the stories true?

And in response, the choir would sing, “Alleluia.”

The children would flower the cross.

The preacher would tell me the stone was rolled away.

The people would pass the peace and welcome strangers and make room in the pews.

And with faith over doubt, I would hope.

For I imagine that all of that ordinary holiness would be enough for Peter and it would be enough for me.

The gospel of Luke continues the Easter account. **Luke 24:13-53** That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing Jesus. Jesus asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." "What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "Jesus was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and Jesus was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped Jesus was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said." Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So Jesus went home with them. As they sat down to eat, Jesus took the bread and blessed it. Then Jesus broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus. And at that moment Jesus disappeared! They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as Jesus talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! Jesus appeared to Peter." Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized Jesus as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," Jesus said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! "Why are you frightened?" Jesus asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As Jesus spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then Jesus asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. Then Jesus said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And Jesus said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things. "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as God promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, Jesus blessed them. While Jesus was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped Jesus and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God." May our eyes be opened. May we recognize the risen Jesus with us always. May our hearts burn within us. May our minds be opened to the word of God. May we let go of our fear and let come peace and great joy. May we receive power from God to be messengers of God's redeeming grace freely offered to all people. Let us be curious and wonder. May we dream of the coming "ands." May we live abundantly the glory of resurrection. Amen

