

THE REST OF THE STORY
LUKE 24: 1-12; ACTS 10: 34-43
EASTER SUNDAY
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Luke 24: 1-12

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

Acts 10: 34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Please pray with me. Lord, on this Easter morning we are in awe of your sacrifice in Jesus Christ. We are in awe of the Good News. Like the women who arrived on Easter morning, we remember what you said – that you *must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again*. We remember what you said, but we are not always sure what to say and what to do. Some people believe Easter is an idle tale. It is safer to stay quiet. Like Peter, we are amazed, but we have much more to learn and experience if we serve you faithfully. The resurrection was long ago. What is the rest of the story? Gracious God, what do we need to learn today? Open our hearts and minds to hear your Word for us this morning. Silence any voice but your own. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Christ is risen. Peter’s sermon in our reading this morning has been described as the most complete, concise articulation of the gospel in the book of Acts (Saunders in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 2, p. 367).

Peter did not begin his discipleship with this understanding. According to the Gospel of Luke, Peter left the empty tomb amazed, but not articulate.

By the time Peter preached to the Gentile family of Cornelius, Peter had seen the Risen Lord. Fifty days after the resurrection, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost. He spoke in front of thousands of people, but it was not the same message he gave to Cornelius. Peter's faith changed over time. His understanding of God's will deepened with each experience.

Like Peter, we have been called by God to follow Jesus. Most Americans are not in church this morning. Most of the people in the world are not celebrating the resurrection of Christ today. Like Peter and the women who arrived at the tomb on Easter morning, we have been called to be Christ's disciples – each according to our gifts and circumstances. Where are we on our faith journey? What is the rest of the Easter story for us today?

In our baptisms we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Disciples are sustained for our journey through communion and the Word. The Spirit guides us so that we grow in faith and faithfulness. The Spirit calls us into a community of believers and into particular acts of discipleship throughout our lives. The Spirit blows where it will.

Before our reading in Acts, the Spirit moved a Roman Centurian to invite Peter to come and talk with him and his family. The same Spirit gave Peter a vision that prepared him to witness to Cornelius. God prepares us, and God prepares those we serve in Christ's name. How is the Holy Spirit moving in our lives today? How did the Spirit move to bring us here this morning? God is already preparing the way for what God wants us to do next.

Our faith begins with God's amazing grace, just as our worship began with the music of amazing grace. God moves in our midst. Christ is risen. The angels told the women not to look for the living among the dead. Easter is more than history. The rest of the story is ongoing. Christ is risen. Christ is present, here and now. We experience Christ's presence in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. The rest of the story is unfolding through disciples like you and me. Easter is the beginning of new life. New life begins today.

Some of us may feel like Peter when he saw the empty tomb. Peter followed Jesus for months. At the Last Supper Peter declared his loyalty and then denied he even knew Jesus when things got tough. No wonder Peter was amazed on Easter morning. He saw Jesus crucified. Was his body stolen? Could the resurrection be true? Peter had the courage to check things out, but Peter had questions, doubts and fears. I imagine many of us do, too.

If we have denied Jesus by the way we live, by the way we have talked, by what we have done to get along or to get ahead, hear the Good News. Easter comes for people who are not perfect. Easter comes for sinners. Easter comes for people like Peter and people like you and me. Easter is the beginning, not the end of the story. Christ is risen. God calls us to be Christ's body in the world today – in our schools, where we work, in our homes, with our friends and with strangers. The rest of the story is our story.

Through his vision and experience with Cornelius, Peter learned that the risen Lord is Lord of all, not just Lord of the Jews. There are always lessons to learn -lessons that are particular to us and to our circumstances, lessons that help us reach out to people around us.

If we want to take part in the rest of Christ's story, we must learn that Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus is Lord of people like us, but Jesus is also Lord of people we do not like and do not know. Jesus is Lord in the church, but Jesus is also Lord of schools, colleges and universities. Jesus is Lord of politics and Lord of the work place. Jesus is Lord of the world.

Presbyterians believe that the rest of our story with Christ will include a family of faith, a community of believers in which we serve and are served by others. We offer our gifts, and we are blessed by others who do the same. The Apostle Paul described the Christian community as a body with many parts, but each part is indispensable. As a community of faith we worship God together. We study God's Word together. We lift each other up, all so that we are equipped to be sent into the world as Christ's witnesses.

The rest of the story includes our worship and spiritual growth. At San Gabriel our worship is based on God's Word. Each week we consider different scriptures and their guidance for how to live. We proclaim the Good News through music, the message and our liturgy. We believe the purpose of worship is to glorify God. At San Gabriel generations worship together. We have children's chapel and a nursery for our youngest disciples, but most of our worship includes all ages. We select our music, message and liturgy with our diversity in mind. As Peter said, Jesus is Lord of all, but the rest of the story unfolds in particular ways for each church and each Christian.

Our office manager attended a worship service in Houston last week. She and her husband expected hear a message about Palm Sunday. Instead they heard a sermon on how to have good sex in marriage. There were visuals: a bust of a man and a bust of woman. The preacher planned to continue his series on good sex for the Easter service. The Houston church believes it is called to reach the unchurched, particularly men and young couples who think the Easter story is irrelevant to their lives. Their worship is segregated by age, so their message can focus on adult topics like sex in marriage. I doubt that you will hear a sermon on good sex at San Gabriel. Jesus is Lord of all, but we are called to serve Christ in particular ways. Like Peter, we are guided by the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the story for some of us may include personal challenges that are daunting. Illness, grief, concerns for someone we love, financial problems, addiction, loneliness, betrayal, broken relationships, failure and other trials may feel like a heavy cross we cannot bear. Jesus told us to bring our burdens to him. If we are the body of Christ, we help each other carry the crosses of life. We worship, serve and study the Word together. The rest of the Easter story is one of community and love.

We are witnesses to all that (Jesus) did ... They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but (to those of) us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commands us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.