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Sermon: March 31, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“EASTER IN GOOD COMPANY”

Luke 24:1-49

{Ro 14:9; 6:9}: **“Christ [Jesus] died and returned to life.” “Since [he] was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”**

This – is – Gospel. It is Good News, for that is what the word *Gospel* means.

{Ro 5:8} **“While we were still sinners”** – {Ro 5:10; 8:7-8; 5:8-10} **“When we were God’s enemies,”** at a time when our **“sinful [minds were] hostile to God”** and we were **“controlled by the sinful nature,”** unable to **“please God”** – **“Christ died for us” “that we might be reconciled to [God] through the death of his Son.”**

As he died for our sake, so {Ro 6:4; 1 Co 15:20-21; Ro 6:5} **“Christ was raised from the dead”** so **“we too may life a new life”!** He is **“the firstfruits of those who have [died]. For since death came through a human being,”** (Adam) **“resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being”** (the Son of God made flesh). **“If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

{Ro 1:16} The Gospel of Jesus is historical fact, spiritual truth, and **“the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”**

In my mind I am convinced this is true. In my heart I feel this is real. I testify, not merely to what I *wish*, but to what I *know*. By the undeserved mercy and kindness of God, his Gospel is saving me.

(I pray that it is saving you as well.)

Even so, I have mixed emotions about Easter:

What does Christ’s victory over sin mean when our world is still awash in toxic iniquity, and I myself continue to sin even though I know better?

What does Christ’s victory over death mean when we and the Creation are persistently plagued by disease, disability, and physical death?

What does Christ’s victory over evil mean when we still excel at immorality, injustice, and idolatry, and the devil is constantly on the prowl?

These questions do not diminish the reality of the resurrection. Neither does the resurrection diminish the reality of these questions.

If you’ve ever asked these questions, you aren’t alone. We are spending Easter in good company!

- Please turn with me to Luke 24:1-8.

{Lk 24:1} **“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women [take] to the spices they [have] prepared and [go] to the tomb.”** They are going to embalm the corpse of their teacher and friend. Until Friday they believed he was more than that; now it seems they were mistaken. Their souls are as dark and cold as the grave.

{Lk 24:2-5a} Upon reaching the tomb they find it open, and empty. They are perplexed, disoriented even. Where is the corpse? What has happened? **“While they [are] wondering about this, suddenly two men in”** blindingly bright garments appear **“beside them”**. The terrified women bow **“down with their faces to the ground.”**

{Lk 24:5b-7} The angels ask: **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.’”**

{Lk 24:8} Finally the women remember what Jesus told them. {Mt 28:8} **“[They hurry] away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy”** says Matthew, **“and [run] to tell his disciples.”** Mark adds that they are {Mk 16:8} **“trembling and bewildered.”**

They are **“Afraid yet filled with joy,” “trembling and bewildered.”** They still have questions *after* they see the empty tomb and listen to the angels.

■ Luke 24:9-12.

{Lk 24:9-10} The women **“[come] back from the tomb”** into the city, to the house where the tattered remnants of the Jesus Movement have gathered, and tell the Apostles and other disciples that Christ is risen.

{Lk 24:10} Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and {Mk 16:1-8} Salome have been with Jesus almost as long as the men have. Salome is the mother of two apostles. Joanna has provided crucial financial support, without which the Movement would have failed. Mary Magdalene has demonstrated exceptional devotion.

All these women were present at Golgatha when Jesus was crucified. All were witnesses of Christ’s burial. These are loyal, courageous, reliable women.

{Lk 24:11} **“But,”** Luke reports, the men **“do not believe the women, because their words [seem] to them like nonsense.”**

Their attitude is one of *disbelief*. To them the Good News *seems like nonsense*.

Doubtless sexism is partly to blame, but not entirely. After all, Thomas will not believe the men when they tell him about the resurrection. These apostles still have questions *after* they see the women’s trembling joy and hear their testimony.

{Lk 24:12} **“Peter, however, [gets] up and runs to the tomb. Bending over, he [sees] the strips of linen lying by themselves, and”** then **“he [goes] away, wondering to himself what [has] happened.”**

Peter **“[wonders] ...what [has] happened.”** He sees the evidence but cannot make heads or tails of it. He is *uncertain* and *confused*. He still has questions after seeing that the tomb and the burial linens are empty!

■ Luke 24:13-35.

{Lk 24:13-16} Later in the day Cleopas and another disciple are making their way to Emmaus, **“a village... about seven miles from Jerusalem. They [are] talking...about [all has] happened. As they [discuss] these things, Jesus himself [comes] up and [walks] along with them; but they”** do not recognize him.

{Lk 25:17-18} the Risen Lord asks what they are discussing. They stop and **“[stand] still, their faces**

downcast.” They are the picture of dejection. Cleopas asks, **“Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know [what has] happened there?”**

{Lk 25:19-24} **“What things?”** the Risen Lord prompts.

“About Jesus,” they say. **“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.”** They explain how he was crucified, how they **“had hoped”** he was the Messiah, and how they had been **“amazed”** earlier in the day when the women told this crazy story about seeing **“angels, who said he was alive.”**

“Their faces downcast,” they speak with disappointment and regret: **“He was a prophet... we had hoped he was the”** Messiah. These two still have questions after the women and the empty tomb.

{Lk 19:25-27} **“How foolish you are”** replies the Risen Lord, **“how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”** And he clarifies what Scripture teaches about himself.

{Lk 24:28-29} **“As they [approach Emmaus], Jesus [continues] on as if he [is] going farther.”** They strongly urge him not to go: **“Stay with us,”** they beg, **“it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.”** So he enters the house with them.

{Lk 24:20-32} But he does not stay for long. **“When he [is] at the table with them, he [takes] bread, [gives] thanks, [breaks] it and [begins] to give it to them. ...their eyes [are] opened and they [recognize] him, and he”** vanishes. They exclaim, **“Were not our hearts**

burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They are *excited* and *energized*. Doubtless they still have questions, even after seeing Jesus.

{Lk 24:33-35} They hurry back to Jerusalem. They find the Apostles and some other disciples wound up and talking a mile a minute: **“It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to [Peter].”** Then Cleopas and his companion tell them what happened on the road, and how they recognized Jesus **“when he broke the bread.”**

■ Luke 24:26-49.

{Lk 24:36} **“While they [are] still talking about this, Jesus”** appears out of nowhere, **“[stands] among them and says... ‘Peace be with you.’”**

{Lk 24:37-39} **“Startled and frightened,”** they think they are seeing **“a ghost.”** **“Why are you troubled”** he says, **“and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”**

{Lk 24:40-43} They examine his hands and feet, but they are so joyful and amazed that **“they still [do] not believe it”** (it is curious that joy and positive amazement can impede belief). So the Risen Lord asks, **“Do you have anything here to eat?”** and **“they [give] him a piece of fish,”** which he eats in their presence.

{Lk 24:44-49} Then he does for them what he did for Cleopas and his companion: he clarifies what Scripture says about him. And he starts to teach them

about their mission, which will begin after the Holy Spirit
“[clothes] **them with power.**”

They are “***startled...frightened...troubled.***”

“***Doubts rise in*** [their] ***minds.***” They are also
overwhelmed with “***joy and amazement.***” They still have
questions after seeing Jesus with their own eyes and
touching him with their own hands.

The resurrection of Christ is Gospel. It is Good
News, for many reasons that are blindingly obvious.

Yet the disciples’ jumbled, mixed-up, all-too-human
response is also Gospel, for this reason: each man and
woman regained faith, grew in the grace and knowledge of
our Lord Jesus, and devoted his or her life to the service of
God’s Kingdom. This is Good News, indeed, for what the
Living God did among and within them, he can and will
(and is already doing) among and within us!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!