Luke 24:1-12: Practice Resurrection
Highland Presbyterian Church, 20 April 2025
C. Nolan Huizenga

Our second scripture reading comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24 (CEB). Women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem witness his vicious death and they see the tomb where Jesus is buried. The women prepare spices and oils for anointing Jesus' body. Then they rest on the sabbath day. Our story picks up at sunrise.

> 24:1 Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb,
> bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the
> tomb, 3 but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 They didn't
> know what to make of this.
>
> Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. 5 The women
> were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them,
> "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He isn't here, but has been raised.
> Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Human One must be
> handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again."8
>
> Then they remembered his words. 9 When they returned from the tomb, they reported all
> these things to the eleven and all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the
> mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the
> apostles. 11 Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the
> women.
>
> 12 But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth.
> Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

NO EXPLANATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH.

That sign stands at the entrance to Church of All Nations in Jerusalem, right next to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed before he died. Apparently the sign is meant to discourage chatty tour guides. And as one Episcopal priest reminds us, NO EXPLANATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH is great advice for Easter Sunday too.[1]

Especially when we read this story from Luke 24. It's a scripture that whispers incredible, joyful news but doesn't offer any explanations. So with the women and the other disciples, we're invited to ponder, to use our imaginations, to listen with our hearts and lives.

These Galilean women find courage to return to their teacher's burial site so they can attend honorably to his mangled body. Just going to the tomb is an act of bravery — of resistance — in a culture of fear where *anyone* might be the authorities' next target.

When the women arrive their ritual of love gets derailed.

---

[1] Friedrich, Jim. "Preaching on Easter Sunday isn't about convincing people." *Christian Century.* 21 April 2019. https://www.christiancentury.org/article/opinion/preaching-easter-sunday-isn-t-about-convincing-people

First, the stone no longer seals the tomb. No explanation for that. But hey, they'd have to get it moved anyway.

The women go in. *No body*. And no explanation.

They're startled by two people dressed in blazing white. No explanation of who they are or how they got there.

These bright strangers ask, "Why do you look for the *living* [wink, wink] here in a place for the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised."

That's the whole news. No explanation. The messengers offer no video clip of the resurrection event. I, for one, would love some scientific info. But they do not say, "Well, his molecules hyperevolved into a plasma state and reconstituted in a new multidimensional configuration governed by the following equations…"

The women hear only the wild news that Jesus is alive. The strangers remind them that Jesus predicted all this, and these women become the first people to perceive that Jesus their teacher is now Jesus the resurrected.

So our brave women go find the rest of Jesus' followers and tell them what they've experienced. Finally here the text reports some of the women's names: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, along with others. And the men…do not believe the women's witness. James doubts his own mother. Men dismissing the experience of women is tragically common in history, and in our current world.

Still, word of Jesus' resurrection empowers Mary, Joanna, Mary, and the others to become ambassadors of God's good news, revealing it to their friends and families. Even thought it's not easy to take in. Peter runs to see for himself and for now he remains baffled.

But on this new and different day, the powers wielding crucifixion no longer get the last word. Christ the resurrected is on the loose, transforming the world. *Hope lives*.

Don't *we* need that good news as much as Jesus' friends did? Is the risen Christ still on the loose here and now? I confess that right now it can feel hard to proclaim that God is up to resurrection, though I pray for it with all my heart. Because the deathly forces that killed Jesus have a lot of parallels in 2025 America.

Rome kept the "peace" by constant threat of violence. Against perceived challenges to its authority the empire dealt ferocious punishments including public death. Jesus was killed by state-sponsored terrorism. Today, with authoritarian rule on the rise globally, and elements of it taking root in the US, we see leaders using the forces of death to protect their own rule and to exclude people they find undesirable.

Like our government rounding up Venezuelan US residents and, without due process and on the flimsiest of accusations, deporting them to a Salvadoran prison infamous for torture and overcrowding and for degrading human lives. Kilmar Abrego Garcia, whose story you've been

hearing in the news, is one of hundreds of men rashly expelled to a third country. Worse, our nation is paying El Salvador to imprison these humans who remain, always, children of God. No one should be treated so unjustly.

Theologian James Cone wrote that "The real scandal of the gospel is this: humanity's salvation is *revealed* in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus, and humanity's salvation is *available* only through our solidarity with the crucified people in our midst."[2] Cone famously connected Jesus' cross with American lynching trees where so many Black lives were stolen. In Jesus *God* stands in solidarity and empathy with the condemned, with the crucified. Can we who love God do anything less?

Don't worry: I'm not going to leave us at the cross this morning. Because that's not where God stops either. On Good Friday Jesus goes to the cross in solidarity with all the condemned. And out of the tomb on Easter Sunday Jesus reveals resurrection power in all its subversive, lifegiving strangeness.

Encountering a hope this mysterious and challenging, arriving without tidy explanations, we need the creative outpouring of artists and musicians and poets to help make sense of it. So for the rest of this Easter sermon let's seek wisdom from two poets who offer us the choice to live joyfully in light of the resurrection.

Like Guatemalan poet and theologian and peace activist Julia Esquivel. During her missional career she bore witness to Guatemala's three-decade civil war that killed 200,000 people. One dictator after another claimed power, death squads roamed the country, and every side of the conflict employed brutality, especially toward the poor, human rights workers, and church workers. Indigenous peoples were systematically slaughtered.

"As a result of her work on behalf of the poor and oppressed in Guatemala [Esquivel] was threatened and harassed by police and army forces for many years, narrowly escaping kidnapping, arrest, and assassination. Finally, in 1980, she was forced to go into exile to save her life."[3] That same year she wrote a poem called "Threatened with Resurrection." I'll read some lines from it, and then I'll give us a moment to reflect on these words and images:

> It is something within us that doesn't let us sleep,
> that doesn't let us rest,
> that won't stop pounding
> deep inside. . .
>
> No, brother,
> it is not the noise in the streets
> which does not let us sleep. . .
>
> Join us in this vigil
> and you will know what it is to dream!

---

[2] Cone, James. "Legacies of the Cross and the Lynching Tree." *Tikkun*. 26 October 2012. My emphasis. https://www.tikkun.org/legacies-of-the-cross-and-the-lynching-tree/

[3] Julia Esquivel biography. The Veterans of Hope Project: https://www.veteransofhope.org/veterans/julia-esquivel/

Then you will know how marvelous it is
to live threatened with Resurrection!

To dream awake,
to keep watch asleep,
to live while dying,
and to know ourselves already
resurrected![4]

They threaten us with resurrection. What an astounding reinterpretation of peril. Julia's faith in the Christian good news fed her passion for life and her work for peace, even under extreme danger. She, like the women in Luke's gospel, became transformed into an ambassador of Christ's resurrection, and that heartbeat of hope propelled her work protecting others from political violence. May Easter hope make us so brave as well.

And on this resurrection day let's hear from one more poet. Kentucky agrarian and writer Wendell Berry will be well-known to many of us. Berry has consistently used his public voice to celebrate the lives and health and value of all creatures. Such conviction has led him to protest, for example, the mining and burning of coal, and to protest the practices of corporate agriculture. Because on this finite planet, we are well on our way toward death by unsustainable production and unsustainable consumption.

Against these forces of death, Berry enlists us — you and me — to love the world as living ambassadors of Christ's resurrection work. In one of Berry's most memorable poems he invites us all to be transformed:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it….
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.

---

[4] Quoted by Sister Janet M. Peterworth in "They Have Threatened Us With Resurrection." Blog post, 1 May 2022. Ursuline Sisters of Louisville: https://ursulinesisterslouisville.org/they-have-threatened-us-with-resurrection/

Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.

Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts….

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in [your beloved's] lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicos
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.[5]

In the name of God Creating,
Christ Resurrecting,
and the Spirit Proclaiming.

[5] Berry, Wendell. "Manifesto: Mad Farmer Liberation Front." *The Country of Marriage*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975. pp. 16-17.