

“A Defiant Easter”

Sermon delivered 4-4-10 Easter Sunday

Immanuel Lutheran Church

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Luke 24:1–12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The 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. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But 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.

Easter

Easter, like Christmas, stretches one to be profound, insightful, and meaningful. This is almost an impossibility, because words fail to describe the indescribable. The best we can do this day is dress up the indescribable experience of what we call Easter with words. Words we receive, and words we use to retell the story of Easter to one another. We are very much like the women who came to the tomb on the first day of the week, with the expectation of there being a body being in the tomb. We come this morning expecting to hear again that Jesus is not here, but he is Risen. Many of us have heard the Easter story so many times, it has lost the punch, the power, and the surprise. Can we hear this story in a new way for our lives? Can we get a word from the Lord we haven't heard before? Most of us accept the resurrection of Jesus without a question. Most of us know that, because he lives, we live. But, what difference does this make in our lives?

But

This morning I invite you to be interactive with the text. Take a look at the Gospel lesson printed above. Theodore Wardlaw noticed how many times Luke uses the word “but” in describing the Easter experience. (*Christian Century/March/2007*) Mathew uses it one, Mark twice, but Luke uses the word “but” 6 times. “But” is a simple, but powerful, three letter word. Wardlaw called the word “but” a “defiant conjunction”. Remember back to your grammar classes - a conjunction is what joins two things together, like the boy *and* the girl, coffee *with* cream, worried *but* hopeful.

“But” is a powerful word. A defiant word. All of us probably use this word more than we know. In talking yesterday morning a member on the Altar Care Team about this word, the person lit up and said, “You know when I say to my daughter “I know this is none of my business, but....” She said her daughter often agrees with her, it is *not* her business! How often do we politely excuse ourselves saying “I would love to...BUT... I would love to help you clean your house, come to your party, loan you one hundred dollars....BUT... actually, no you wouldn’t. “But” eradicates everything that was said before, “I really like your dress, BUT it is too short.” Luke uses our conjunction in a creative way to tell the Easter Story. Defiance is a way to practice resurrection - a refusal to accept things just as they are in our lives.

Defiant Conjunction

So, let us look at the Easter Experience of Luke with this defiant conjunction. Our story this morning opens with the words, “But on the first day of the week... the sentence before this (which is not written in our text) says, “The women who came from Galilee ...saw the tomb and where they laid the body... but, on the first day of the week they found the stone had been rolled away.” Luke is putting clothes on this first Easter Experience. He refuses to allow Good Friday to have the last word by opening with this defiant conjunction. This “But” will defy what the women remembered from the day before. The Easter Story invites us to defy things as being the norm, because God is doing a new thing on the first day of the week.

The Last Word

The second “but”, re-“but”tal if you will, appears in verse 3, “but when they went in ... they did not find the body.” The sentence before this reads “the stone was rolled away”... but_____. They thought they would see as we expect to see from the Good Fridays of our lives, the disappointments, disenchantments, and discouragements from the Good Fridays of life - but this is not the last word. The defiant conjunction of Easter refuses to allow Good Friday to be the last word in the story of your life. I don’t care if you are facing death, it is not the last word. Thanks to this defiant conjunction, there is life, new life. So, how does this defiant conjunction apply to your life? The empty tomb declares death cannot contain and hold Jesus.

Another “but” occurs in verse 5b “ ...but the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” We need to be reminded of the power of this day, and live defiantly against what we consider to be the real world of Good Friday. We live defiantly when we practice resurrection in our daily lives. We refuse to look at just the past, the way we have always done life, and living and this is the way it is. Instead, we dust off this “but” and wonder what this new thing God is doing in your life, and in the world, by refusing to accept the answer Good Friday gives you.

The new thing he did, and is doing, is the second “but” in verse 5b. “...but he is Risen” with the conjunction “he is not here” in relation to the next “But” in verse 11 “But these words seem like an idle tale...” to them and to us when we know and believe that Jesus was raised by God but we live our lives in a Good Friday fashion. Easter defiantly challenges us .

The final “but” in our Gospel this morning is in last verse. “But Peter, got up and ran to the tomb...” in response to declaring what the women had said as an idle tale. We are challenged to get up from our Good Friday world. We are challenged through the defiant conjunction to allow ourselves to be raised to new life by the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Challenged

We are challenged to leave the tomb, and the grave clothes we wear, behind by practicing resurrection on a daily basis. As God’s Kingdom continues to break into our world, Easter challenges us to live defiantly by practicing resurrection. *Practicing Resurrection* is the title of a book I read last year. I can’t remember what Nora Gallagher said, but I loved what the title implied. We people are more than just a people who hear the story, we are more than a people who believe the story of Jesus, we are a people who live this story by the power of the God who calls us into new life.

Victory

This morning we are going to do things a little differently by celebrating Holy Communion with Champagne instead of red wine. I pray when someone asks you how did Easter go for you, you will say, “Fine, BUT we used champagne.” Why champagne? First of all, it is how victories are celebrated, and today, as every Sunday, is the victory of our Lord. But secondly, I hope this will call you back to thinking of the challenge we face as practicing Christians - to refuse to allow Good Friday to be the norm without the “But”.

How are we... how can we practice resurrection in a Good Friday world? Practice is what Easter is about. Easter invites us to practice living the resurrection - and we can do it! I like the idea of practicing over perfecting. Mother Teresa summed this practice up well when she said “People are unreasonable, illogical, and self centered (but) love them anyway. “ The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow, “but” do it anyway. Honesty makes you vulnerable, “but” be honest anyway. What you spend years building maybe destroyed overnight, “but” build anyway. If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives, “but” do good anyway.

Practice Resurrection by living the defiant conjunction of “But” as a response to believing “Good Friday” is the last Word. May this three letter word become powerful in experience of God in your life. Amen.

