**Seeking the Living among the Dead**

**Easter Sunday**

**Narrative Lectionary**

**April 16, 2017**

Luke 24: 1-12 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Jesus was dead, crucified, suffering a most horrible torturous death. He had been laid in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea on Friday, and the women followed to know where he had been laid. The Sabbath was upon them so the traditional anointing of the body with spices would have to wait until Sunday. They waited for the first light of Sunday morning before heading out, even then it was still risky. As followers of Jesus, they all could be at risk of being arrested, they were all in hiding. Yet, these women went anyway, out of love and compassion and duty. In their grief they wondered who would roll the stone away. They need not worry, as they found it rolled away and two men in dazzling clothes, which meant they were messengers of God were there and asked them, “why do you seek the living among the dead?”. Some translators believe that it should actually read ‘living one’ – why do you seek the living one among the dead. They are reminded of what Jesus told them, about his suffering, dying and rising from the dead, which none of them seemed to believe. These women were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Witnesses that the men would not believe because they were women, yet God chose them to spread the news. In this, the message of Jesus’ radical inclusion continues on after his death.

‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’. This is a profound question for us to consider as well. There is much despair and death in the world that can feed into fear and hopelessness. We focus so much on the bad news, which is where death is. Where violence and terrorism rule, and the response which breeds more fear. Where there is abuse, intolerance and hatred. Where there is promotion of war and violence as a solution to violence. We need to remember that Jesus said in the garden, those who live by the sword will die by the sword. There is no life in these ways of being. But too often this is where we look for hope, for new life. We keep hoping things will change. But we need to look beyond these places to where change is happening, and it is happening. We just don’t hear about it, because it is not ‘newsworthy’.

There is much new life. In a world that is more and more operating out of fear, and closing its doors to refugees and those in need. There are movements of people and communities who refuse to buy into that fear, who are finding ways of creating sanctuary and space for those who are at risk of being deported or persecuted and be a welcoming place for refugees. Have you heard of the [Sanctuary City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary_city) movement to name cities as sanctuary for refugees? There is a movement in [Regina](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/saskatchewan-sanctuary-city-1.3968319) to create us as a Sanctuary city. Jesus is alive in welcoming the stranger.

In a world of more violence and retribution, there is an increasing movement of people who are standing up against it. This week, we saw or heard of a horrific attack on Afghanistan by the United States. They employed the largest conventional weapon and most powerful non-nuclear weapon ever used in combat. It is a [Massive Ordinance Air Blast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GBU-43/B_Massive_Ordnance_Air_Blast) bomb and has been nicknamed, the Mother of all bombs. I quickly saw reactions go up on my Facebook and Twitter feeds, about how offensive this name is. Women were offended that we would use Mother to refer to a bomb. My friend Anna Galloday, [Faith marks](http://ourfaithmarks.com/) curator, pastor from Chattanooga, TN and [Skylight Festival](http://www.skylightfestival.ca) Contributor posted:

I'm sickened when the term "the mother of all..." is used to describe something as horrid as a means by which we kill one another. The scope of mothering is intended to point toward nurture and growth, not destruction and death

There are people and growing movements resisting retributive violence as a response to terrorism and other attacks. We can draw hope from the millions who gathered and marched in January for the [Women’s march](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Women%27s_March). These folk and those who support them are active in their communities. Jesus resisted non-violently. Jesus is alive in the resistance to violence.

Many in the church may have a sense that the church is dying. In many ways it is, or the old ways and structures of it are dying. Traditional ways of doing church are dying. Sunday morning attendance is down. But new ways are emerging. We may despair at what seems a rise in evangelicals influencing politics, particularly in the south, but I have a sense that there is an even larger growing influence of those who have left conservative and fundamentalist evangelicalism and created a movement of [Progressive Evangelicals](http://www.theopennetworkus.org/about/). These faithful followers have left a fear based image of God and the limited doctrines of fundamentalism for a more progressive and inclusive faith. It is a growing movement which sees that its moral calling of being faithful to Jesus, includes standing for just policies for the poor and vulnerable as well as inclusion for LGBT folk in church and society. This is one example of new movements and new life happening in the church. Jesus stood with those who were poor and marginalized. Jesus is alive in those living faithfully and standing with the poor and vulnerable.

There are many examples of where there is life. The living one is among us, we just need to know where to look. It is not among the dead, the life-deniers, those whose way of life is not life-giving. The messengers who appeared to the woman at the tomb, were a sign of the presence of God. They reversed all expectations of the moment. A shift began to happen. Indeed a profound shift happened in the community. Whatever you believe about resurrection, the truth is, our truth is, that the community was transformed from fear to hope, from despair to joy. The presence of God in Jesus, transformed them, resurrected them to new life and new hope and action to live out Jesus’ example and be the Christ in the world. That example led Jesus to the cross. It is often said that Jesus died for our sins. However, many challenge this, and I believe that Jesus died because of sin. He died faithfully following what God wanted, living how God wanted him and us to live. It challenged the powers and systems of the time as it does today. Those who couldn’t live with that challenge silenced him. But God cannot be silenced. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s affirmation that all that Jesus said and did was right and good. Love wins. We are called to do the same, following Jesus’ example of loving compassion, and supporting the poor and vulnerable. Where do we see that hope today? Where do you experience signs of God’s presence today? This is where resurrection is for us. Christ lives in us when we live as God calls us to in Jesus. Jesus is alive! Christ is Risen and is in us! Thanks be to God.