

## “Its Nonsense!”

Luke 24:1-12

April 21, 2019

How did you feel when you came into the sanctuary this morning?

How do you think Mary felt that first Easter Sunday?

Did the atmosphere coincide with what you had been thinking, earlier this morning? When you got up this morning were your thoughts joyous, cheerful, and festive as you opened the windows and doors to enjoy the new day, showered and shaved (some of us anyway), got dressed, out the door, and on your way to church.

When you arrived, as you looked around the church, you would have seen that it was dark (and thought Did the Board of Managers not pay the hydro bill?), the crown of thorns was still lying beside the table and it was still covered with the torn cloth. You may have asked yourself: Was this really Easter Sunday?

Now there are lilies and daffodils at the front of the church. The choir has sung some special music, we have sung those upbeat happy hymns: *Jesus Christ is risen today, I danced in the morning and Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks for the risen Lord*. The atmosphere has changed since we first came in and it is now more like it is every Sunday morning that we meet – our being here is telling the amazing news of Easter Day.

What news was shared that first Easter morning?

*It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Luke 24:10-11*

The men thought the women’s report that Jesus had risen was nonsense. I cannot think of a more reasonable reaction to the story. They thought the story nonsense.

That’s common sense, isn’t it? Jesus was dead. He had been brutally put to death. Joseph of Aritmethea had arranged for the corpse to be placed in a tomb and it was left through Friday night and the following Sabbath day. Now today, on Sunday morning, those women come running with a garbled story about angels telling them that the corpse had been raised to new life.

The male disciples knew far better than to believe fairy tales. Such talk had to be hysterical nonsense. It was far more sensible to face the terrible fact: the enemies of Jesus had nailed him. Crucified dead and buried. Dead, dead, dead! This was no time for wishful thinking by women who could not cope with the disaster. Face facts. Jesus was dead and with him were buried all their brave hopes for a bright new world.

As I read this story I can only applaud Luke’s courage in telling the Easter account this way. Much later in the first century, when Luke was writing, the apostles were the famous heroes, many of them were now the holy martyrs of the faith; a glorious company of those who had been faithful to Christ Jesus unto death. But Luke tells it warts and all. These glorious men were at first disbelievers. They had treated the reports of resurrection as nonsense.

I see the reaction of the apostles as most reasonable, maybe that’s because I am a male. It was common sense. In times of disaster, some one has to keep their feet on the ground. Jesus was dead; history. And no amount of their love for him could con them into believing this hysterical story.

And yet, it is the concerted witness of the New Testament that they were wrong. The women were right - the apostles were wrong. Common sense was wrong, being realistic was wrong. Jesus was alive. It defies all our attempts to explain it, our faith in Easter may look stupid in the eyes of others, but with one voice the witnesses cry out: Jesus Christ is risen today, hallelujah!

During the last fifty years there has been a tendency in Western Christianity to treat the resurrection as a metaphor; to see it as a holy idea of success after failure, restoration after disgrace, hope after hopelessness. This has of course some validity. The resurrection of Jesus is a mighty metaphor.

However, it has been regrettable that sometimes the rising of Christ is taught **only** as a metaphor. Sometimes the very origin of the metaphor has been discarded; the event of Christ rising has been either played down or denied.

Not so in the New Testament. There the resurrection is at the forefront of the Christian movement. **It was something that really happened.** Remarkable, indescribable, and for many implausible, yet the Jesus who was crucified was known to be very much alive. Death had been transcended. The tomb could not and did not hold the beautiful young Lord – the one we call Jesus.

Jesus, this same Jesus, was alive, and because he lives we shall live also. Death is not a dead end. It was not the end for Jesus, or the New Testament Christians. Sometimes they talk about it in words like resurrection, sometimes with the phrase eternal life. But the essence was not a metaphor but reality.

The earliest surviving documents which we possess are the letters of the apostle Paul. He, like some of the Gospels, talks about the “appearances of Jesus.” Jesus appeared to disciples in various situations; to Peter and then the other disciples, and on one occasion he appeared to over five hundred people gathered together. Last of all, Paul says, “he appeared even to me”. But not like a ghost. It was the same Jesus although his body had been radically transformed. These days we might try to express it by saying some kind of sub-atomic metamorphosis had taken place. And as we grasp for the words; trying to explain the whole improbable-yet-true, resurrection thing, is it not utterly consistent with the extravagant and slightly ridiculous God of the parables and deeds of Jesus. Again and again we are confronted with a loving God who “goes over the top” in his generosity. A God who does not know when to stop, when enough is enough, when things are past redemption. A prodigal God.

Remember

- the ridiculous case of the first sign that Jesus did at the wedding in Cana? How he turned about 600 litres of water into wine? 600 litres! (400 bottles just like this)
- or the parable about the mother who decides to bake some bread, goes prodigal and mixes up enough dough for 60 loaves of bread?
- or that pivotal parable about the father who recklessly gives his second son half the value of the family farm and allows him to go off to the city and squander it; and when the young fool comes crawling home asking to be a servant, the father runs to meet him, gives him a big hug and throws a **giant** party in his honour?
- or Jesus’ commendation of Mary (the woman who had truly caught the vision of a prodigal God) who in her deep love for Jesus anointed his feet with costly perfumed oil worth about \$50,000 ?

It seems like nonsense? Of course it does. It is so foreign to our way of seeing and doing things.

If the Gospel story has been telling us anything, it has proclaimed this: Get ready for a God who does the unexpected and the ultra-extravagant thing. Don’t try to confine God to our little human notions of what seems like common sense; break out from what seems reasonable. God is unreasonably extravagant, gloriously unpredictable. The holy, saving nonsense of God is mightily at work at Easter!

Such is the heart of the Easter message. Unpredictable and prodigious. *Now is Christ raised from death, the first fruits of the harvest of the dead.*

My dear friends, I have not got a clue about how to define the resurrected life of Christ, nor do I have any way of explaining what our resurrection reality will finally be like. Eternal life, unlimited in every direction, leaves me dumb-founded!

Do I have an adequate explanation? Sorry, no.

But an affirmation? YES a definite - YES! The resurrection is totally consistent with the whole Jesus happening, in line with the unreasonable, debonair nature of the Gospel.

Easter is truly about that glorious implausibility of the holy love of God who will never, never let us go.