

Luke 24:1-12

This Is What Love Can Do

April 4, 2021

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## Scripture

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

## Sermon

This is a story of remembering.

And I have to be honest, I am not the best rememberer.

That was highlighted this week as we prepared to transition back to worshipping in-person. Rev. Hubbard, who joined our staff while we were worshipping online only, did her best to stay one step ahead of me, anticipating what needed to be done. Unfortunately for both of us, my recollection of how we do things returned only gradually and somewhat incompletely, for maximum inconvenience. It wasn't until things were done one way that I remembered that isn't the way we really do them. Remembering, like adulting, is hard.

Talking with colleagues this week, I've learned that the word remember has taken on a new meaning for some congregations that, like ours, haven't gathered in-person for a while. The new meaning requires the addition of a hyphen: re-

remembering. This hyphenated form of the word means to draw together a community that has been forced apart, for example, like during a pandemic. It is the gathering together of people who have not been in the same space for a long time. I am delighted to both remember and re-member with you today.

As I said, the story Rev. Hubbard read for us from the Gospel of Luke is a story of remembering. It begins with some women who, having observed the Sabbath, went to Jesus' tomb early in the morning to prepare his body for burial. It was customary for families to wash and anoint with perfumes and spices the bodies of their loved ones. They loved Jesus. As far as they were concerned, he was family. It was a job the women had likely done before, but that didn't make this time in less gut-wrenching. I imagine that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach, the one that accompanies intense dread. When they got to the tomb, they were shocked by the absence of Jesus' body. We don't shock so easily these days...in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, special effects, *Zombie Apocalypse* world, we have been desensitized to just how startled the women would have been. If there was one thing to be sure of, it was that a dead body would stay in its tomb. But this body was not in the tomb. I can imagine they were thinking, "What kind of a horrible person would have taken his body?"

As they searched their minds for the answer to that question, two sparkly angels appeared. Their role in the story was to help the women remember, "Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee," they said, "that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again. Then they remembered his words..." The courageous, yet terrified, women left the tomb and went to tell the men who, upon hearing what the women straight up didn't believe them, "Fake news. These women...they just say the things...they gossip...make things up. They prattle on..." Not Peter, though. He ran to the tomb to see for himself. He saw the linen cloths in which Jesus' body had been wrapped. They were right there, in the tomb, and the women were right: Jesus was not there. Peter went home, amazed at what had happened.

In this story, there were women who were scared and confused, obtuse men who, to be fair, were probably afraid, including Peter, who was amazed, but didn't even bother to go back to tell the other men what he had seen. But, in the whole story, no Jesus, just an empty tomb and a lot of questions. Yet here we are with our brass trio, singing Alleluia, eating cookies, and looking like we are having a

party. I wonder if our celebration would seem a little tone deaf to those first followers of Jesus who must have felt more desperate than hopeful and more doubtful than faithful. Who would have thought an empty tomb would be the end of the story?

As is the case with a good number of the Jesus stories, the gospel writers don't agree on what happened when Jesus' disciples went to the tomb. And that's okay because it helps us remember that we each have our own stories, our own perspectives, and our own Holy experiences. In Matthew and John's resurrection stories, the women who go to the tomb actually encounter Jesus, which makes our grand Easter celebrations seem a little more on point. But in Mark, and this story in Luke, the women leave the tomb, terrified, having only encountered emptiness, some shiny angels, and their own grief. This story of Luke's does not scream, "Let's celebrate!" Yet we do. Why do we celebrate a story of Jesus' resurrection that never encounters Jesus?

Because we have the benefit of knowing that the story does not end there. This story helps us remember that the suffering, violence, injustice, and oppression on Friday were not the end of the story. There is hope, then, that the suffering in our own lives, the violence, injustice, and oppression we see and experience in the world will not be the end of the story today. The confusion at the empty tomb, the fear and disbelief of the disciples, and Peter's sad reaction to what he saw that day, were not the end of the story, which again, gives us hope that our own doubts and questions, our mistakes, and our scared silence, are not the end of the story either.

The story continues to be written and told because this isn't just the disciples' story. It isn't just your story or my story or even just Jesus' story. It is God's story and that makes it our story and our neighbor's story, and everyone's story. It reaches beyond any one time and any one place. It will not be contained by the boundaries of our imaginations or the borders and walls we put around ourselves. It will not be limited by our fears or our flaws. It is a story that over and over again bears witness to God's limitless love.

And this part of Luke's story is no different. You see, what the disciples were too scared and sad to see was that when the Roman Empire violently killed their friend, the thing he was willing to sacrifice for, the one thing that was worth dying

for, was still very much alive in the world and there was no containing it. LOVE. And here is the really cool part of the story. It was the disciples and their memories of Jesus that would keep the love Jesus died for alive. The disciples in so many ways seemed to be a hot mess, yet they remembered.

They remembered what Jesus taught them. They remembered how he included them. They remembered what it was like to be so inspired by his vision for the world that they abandoned their work to follow him.

They remembered the miracles, the healings, the nets full of fish, the time he ate at the home of a tax collector. They remembered the stories he told that, at times, felt more like puzzles than wisdom.

They remembered that he seemed to know more about love than anyone they had ever known. They kept his love alive by continuing to learn what it meant to "...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself," And they told their children and their grandchildren. They didn't know it, but the disciples were the resurrection.

And so are we. Each one of us is the embodiment of God's limitless love. Each one of us is living proof that God's story is still being written. Our lives must be a testimony to what love can do because that same love the disciples remembered is still loose in the world today...and it's our job to throw it around like confetti...or better yet, like glitter. Today we celebrate that love did this. Love remembered this community. This is what love can do. For a long time, we have chosen to gather together, not because we recite a common creed, not because we all like the same music, or agree on everything. This community gathers because of God's love that is loose in the world, because of God's limitless love. We gather because we believe love heals trauma, love creates safety, love makes space, love includes, love blesses, love affirms, love encourages, love speaks....in short, this is what love can do. Love wins...today and every day. Amen.

If you would like to be part of what love can do, and you are here in person, I invite you to come forward to join the church as we sing. If you are at home, you can send us a message or comment on this broadcast. Everyone is welcome. And now, please rise in body or spirit as we sing.