

## Nonsense

Jubilee Mennonite Church  
Easter, April 1, 2018

**Purpose:** To declare the reality of resurrection as the defining context of our faith.

**Message:** We are confronted with the challenges of new life in resurrection that remind us again that God comes to us in all things, and creates something new.

**Scripture:** Luke 24:1-12 [focus text—I will read]; Isaiah 25:1-10 [secondary text—Please read]; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

**Synopsis:** We are used to the world being controlled by consequences. One action always has an equal and opposite reaction. We treat this as unassailable truth; a reality that cannot be ever altered. Death we see as a consequence of life. It just is, and it cannot be changed. The first disciples believed this as completely as we do. So there is little wondering why the disciples in Luke's Gospel do not believe what is being told to them, and dismiss the words of the witnesses as nonsense, the fiction of grieving minds. But they go in the midst of the failures to see if beyond hope it could be true. As foolish as it sounds. God comes to us time and again in love to heal that which would divide us. God's healing of sin on the cross to us seems unbelievable.

The resurrection of Easter goes beyond the healing of a legalistic slight to the honor of God. It is about God stating clearly and unequivocally that there is no place that we can be that God is not, that God's work of love continues even here. In the midst of an empty tomb that looked nothing like what they were expecting, came a message to the lost and the losers—a challenge to spread the good news to all God's people. You don't have to empty the tomb yourself. You just have to point out to others that it's been done.

## **Luke 24:1-12**

**24** On the first day of the week,  
very early in the morning,  
the women took the spices they had prepared  
and went to the tomb.

<sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,  
<sup>3</sup> but when they entered,  
they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this,  
suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed  
like lightning stood beside them.

<sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down  
with their faces to the ground,  
but the men said to them,  
“Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
<sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen!  
Remember how he told you,  
while he was still with you in Galilee:

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners,  
be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”

<sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.

<sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb,  
they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

<sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,  
and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

<sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

<sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb.

Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves,  
and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Of all the ways and means of encountering Easter Sunday and the revelation of a new way of being, I think that this one of Luke's is my favourite. There are some things missing. There aren't the in-person appearance and miss-recognitions of a risen Christ. There isn't the breathless footrace between two disciples to see what has happened. All in all it is a relatively routine tending to the work of the day with a profound twist that changes the script forever more. Rather than awe and wonder from all who heard it, there are stories and reports being brought back to terrified disciples, firmly in the grasp of grief declaring something that they can barely understand, let alone to know to be true at the drop of a hat. What this lacks in drama, action and revelation of a risen Lord, it makes up for with what I think is realism. It sounds right to me. Because it sounds so very much like the humans I know. The human I know that I am. It is far to consistent with who the disciples have been all along: confused, uncomprehending, and generally afraid to leap before looking.

The eleven apostles, the followers of Christ who dedicated themselves to following come what may, are not the ones to go out to do the chores that morning. It was the female disciples who went out to do what needed to be done to honour the body of the Lord, to do what needed to be done. The rest were busy hiding, and chances are they would have liked to as well. They find what they are not looking for: an open tomb, an empty grave, and a couple of startling angels proclaiming what they did not expect, but somehow remembered was what Jesus was talking about the whole time. It is this that they take back to the ones they left behind. Whether out of first century sexism, fear, confusion, or just to avoid the head and heartache that was sure to come if they entertained the possibility of the story being true, they dismissed it out of hand. "nonsense" they said, and go back to their grieving.

Except not all of them do. We read these stories so many times we miss the small details, or at least I do. It took me a while to picture the scene. Put this in your mind's eye: People in middle of grief, in the grip of fear, hiding behind locked doors, likely haven't slept or ate for days. They have given up hope, and even betrayed what they held most dear. They hear what to them sounds like the most foolish thing they have heard this long week. The women come breathless declaring their eureka moment. Nonsense they declare, waving them off. But as soon as the word leaves his lips, Peter freezes, stunned like a goat in the marketplace, drops his cup and takes off like a shot. You might want to even want to put in someone doing a spit take in

there somewhere. It's a marvelous, contradictory action and reaction. It's a double take of belief and disbelief, so utterly human. It's exactly what I think I might have done were I in that depressing room. Our heads tell us that it can't be true, a foolish joke, but our eager feet carry us to check it out all the same.

Karl Barth, one of the last century's pre-eminent theologians suggested that the real reason anyone ever comes to worship, no matter what the Sunday is to sit with the unspoken question of heart and mind of "is this true?" Is it true that God took the established routine of life and death and made an exception, not just once, but forever more? Is it true that love could be possibly stronger than the death-dealing powers of this world? Is it true that something so radical happened this morning that it reframes entirely our notions of life and living? Is it true that God would enter into our world, our lives, our circumstances? Is it true that God accomplishes all this not through the hands of competent, sure footed believers, but through the mistake-ridden missteps of doubting disciples? Is it true?

Oh but it is. We proclaim this to be true not because we can demonstrate it beyond a shadow of a doubt, pulling out CSI Jerusalem to make our case. I am not convinced we are well served to necessarily try. We proclaim it to be true because we know the God who works within it. It strikes me that this day is one of the highest in terms of attendance of the church. Because it seems like such an awkward place to jump into the story. Were I designing the course, I am not sure I would start at Easter, at the most crucial, yet revolutionary and out of this world bit of the whole story. Wouldn't it be easier to start with something a little less pressing and more familiar? Some teachings, perhaps some of those fun miracles or something like that?

Yet where else can we start? It is clear that if we keep reading after this day that this is not the conclusion of the story, but rather a beginning of the whole of what Jesus promised to his followers, to us, that would come after: the spirit, the hope, the life whose source always amazes. The disciples spreading the word make almost no mention of the wedding at Cana, the Miracles, or anything like that when they are preaching the good news. They declare Christ Crucified, Christ risen and what was long broken now healed. Without the resurrection, without this inaugural event of the Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven. Today we join the centuries of the faithful running to the tomb to see if it were all indeed true. It's not like the ancient people were less inquiring than us; they had seen death in far greater detail than most of us ever will. We now

have layers and systems to place between us and the dying; they didn't. Never had they seen someone come back to life again. This is not normal, yet it is so very critical all the same.

In the resurrection God gives us such a miracle of love and forgiveness that it is worthy of faith, and thus open to doubt. A challenging word for the morning at heart of faith, but bear with me here. It is very doubts we may hold attest to the scale and power of what we proclaim, because it allows the reality of faith to fill in the blanks that we may carry. Realities that don't have a bit of nonsense and are verifiable by our standards of logic and empiricism are not sufficiently large enough to reveal God to us. Because what is going on here is far too big to be contained by our notions of normalcy; it has to be nonsense be it is just that good.

I believe like Peter in the nonsensical hope of the resurrection in body and in truth; the radical, mind bending notion of God's love in ALL things that keeps me running time and again to the tomb, amazed every time I see it empty. Easter is the great healing of all things, and as such it is the only place to start. It tells us once and for all that God is not our enemy, and never has been. Rather, God loves all of creation, and never meant creation to suffer, enslaved to death and subject to fear. God becomes human to heal humanity, to repair that which was never meant to be broken. And he goes about the work of healing in life, in death, in resurrection.

A woman is met at the well, looking for love she can never find. God comes and sits with her and says "I am the water; I love you, and that will never die."

A man, for the sake of greed and ambition becomes a tax collector, sells out his own people, participating in the system of oppression, friendless, alone. God comes, and calls him out of his Tree saying "Zacheus, come down. I will be your friend. I will dine with you. Salvation will come to your house."

Here is a woman caught in adultery, condemned to be executed for her sin, to be used as a pawn before hand. She is brought into the presence of God. God kneels in the dust beside her and says, "No one here can condemn you. I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more."

A man, because of randomness of a human nature, has contracted a disease, a paralytic, unable to walk. And God comes to him and says, 'Son, yours sins are forgiven, rise, Take up your pallet and walk.'

And when humanity, driven by fear and pride, maintaining its system of power, enforced by violence, arrests, and condemns, and tortures and crucifies God, God replies, 'I forgive you.'

When humanity experiences the brokenness of our nature, and fall away into death to be forever separated from God, God says "Love is greater than the grave. If you make your bed Sheol, I am there." God in Christ pursues nonsensical love all the way into death.

God also says "I am the resurrection and the life." God has overcome death and fear because God is bigger than death, is bigger than our systems of guilt and shame, is bigger than anything that would put us in the grave. We know well the places of pain and separation in our lives. Yet even there is no place the God is not. God fills all of creation with love, flooding our world once and for all with life that will not, cannot end.

This is the nonsensical, foolish truth of the Love of God. God came into the midst of a band of confused, disillusioned, frightened people and said to them "do not be afraid; look it is me, coming to you in love." This healed them, transformed them, and revolutionized them from a rag-tag group of fearful misfits to the people who would take the good news of an empty grave to a waiting world, risking all that they were for the sake of this good news. This is the nonsense that changed the world, and continues to turn the world around. It is this nonsense that would say that no situation is beyond hope, no place is beyond God, no soul beyond love, no warring peoples beyond peace and healing. It is this love, this promise that draws me back time and again to both ask 'is it true' and declare beyond my own disbelief 'I know that my redeemer lives, and yet in my flesh will I see God'. It is this that sends me running as fast as my feet will carry me to the tomb to be amazed.

It all seems too good to be true. It is not easy to believe that forgiveness is bigger than sin. It is not easy to love our enemies. It is not easy to believe, help our disbelief. But with God, all is not only possible, but also likely. With God, all of this nonsense is too good not to be true. May this be our passion, our proclamation, our living creed, now and always. Amen.