



Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

Luke 24:1-11

Sermon in dialogue: a Moment with a Witness

EA = Erica Avena

MM = Mary, the Magdalene

*Mary enters:*

EA: How did you get here?

Mary: I heard my name and I came through this door. I like those candles! How do you light them way up there?

EA: Wait, who are you, exactly?

MM: I'm Mary. Of Magdala. I'm a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. And who are you, exactly?

EA: I'm Erica Avena and I'm here in church with these good people on Easter Sunday.

MM: And who are "these good people?"

EA: they have gathered to hear the Easter story, told again. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple today? In a world that does not always want to hear about it? It's not as popular as you might expect it to be, it's not easy being modern disciples. Sometimes we're even called upon to make sacrifices... we've had a tough year, couple of years... this group has been through a lot.

But you knew Jesus as well as anyone –

MM: Jesus healed me - along with Joanna, Suzanna. We have been with him ever since - supporting his ministry, he has stayed with us and our friends, we have provided for him and the disciples, we traveled together.

And then, three days ago, the women and I were there. At the cross. He told us it was going to happen but ... I couldn't believe it when he took his last breath. I felt like I had died. All of us did. They brought him down from the cross before the sabbath, and put him in a tomb carved out of rock, that Joseph of Arimathea let

us use. Of course, I expected the body to still be there on the first day of the week. I was prepared with the spices and all to complete the final preparations of his body. But he wasn't there and... And then I walked through this door...

EA: You came through this door, it's a portal! Doors are portals – literally – doors are, but so are stories, scripture is a portal, music, prayer, sabbath are portals, Easter is a portal! We read of prophecy and fulfillment in our scriptures. *Your* experience with Jesus fulfills prophecy! We have been sharing your story for 2000 years: generation to generation. (Elders to children, elders to children...and so on) We were just reading about your experience, and here you are!

MM: You are reading the story of today? Of what just happened? You're calling it Easter? How?... I believe the holy scriptures convey prophecy and fulfillment. That's what you are reading from... a scroll of some kind? You said 2000 years? It's been 2000 years and you are talking about Jesus? Tell me how you know about Jesus? Is he here? Is that why I heard my name? Is Jesus here somewhere?

EA: Yes, he is here, but not in the way you are thinking. Oh, yes, Jesus is here. ...On that morning, Mary, what did you see, exactly?

MM: Nothing. We didn't see anything. He wasn't in the tomb, the stone was rolled away, there were these two strange men whose clothes were so bright we couldn't look at them. They reminded us of Jesus' teaching about his death and that he would rise on the third day and then we remembered and we went to tell the eleven but they didn't believe us ...after all that we've been through, they didn't believe us ... so I was looking for...J

EA: Jesus! is in the world, and in our lives, we can even see Jesus' face in the faces of one another.

MM: Right - for where two or three are gathered, Jesus is there among us. I remember that.

So - someone did believe me! Someone shared the story. What about you Erica Avena, Do you believe me?

EA: Actually, I do, yes. I believe you.

MM: And what about you (to congregation) - do you believe me?

MM: ...Alright. (takes a deep breath) Alright. Then it was not for nothing, it is not for nothing!... (another pause to take it in and a deep breath) Well, nice Temple you have here, great garden, and nice chatting with you...I have someone I need to see so I need to get going.

EA: Wait, I need your help. This is not at Temple. We gather here, read the Bible, remember Jesus' baptism and last supper with his disciples, and encourage and challenge one another to be modern day disciples. This building stands for that, but it's just a building; the building is not – relationships! How did Jesus begin that with you and the other disciples? You are so committed to each other – how did that come about?

MM: He showed us what love looks like. He showed us how love heals us, how it challenges us, how it often asks more of us than we are willing to give. He taught us to trust ourselves and trust each other and as much as we trusted him. And he taught us how to restore our trust when it was broken. How to forgive each other when we failed. And we failed. Lots of times...

EA: I'd like to know about Judas. Have you seen him since the last supper? How is Judas, now?

MM: Judas. I was looking for him just now, when I heard my name coming from this place - Judas needs to know that Jesus is alive. That everything has been restored. And I think he needs to prepare himself to see Jesus - and to receive the opportunity to know that he is forgiven and to forgive himself. He needs to do his act of restoration.

Peter betrayed Jesus too - three times. And all the rest of the men ran away when Jesus needed them most. All of us fell asleep while Jesus was praying at Gethsemane. All of us need an act of restoration so that we can forgive ourselves as I know Jesus has already forgiven us.

I need to go. I have to go and find Judas. He needs to hear this good news! About Jesus and about all of you. The story will be passed from generation to generation! Of course it will!

(starts to go and then turns back to the congregation) 2000 years ... we have our time and now you have your time. Christ is risen. For me. For Judas. For you. For all of us. Please make it count. Ok? (exits)

EA:

- Mary of Magdala was a real woman in history. She was the first witness to the resurrection, she was disbelieved at first...
- Although Jesus forgave Judas, they were not able to be reconciled in this life. Judas prevented that from happening... Not Jesus.
- Peter and the disciples got their moment of restoration when Jesus invited them to join him for breakfast on the beach after his resurrection.
- Thomas only believed when he touched the wounds of the risen Christ.

This church rests on the strength of those relationships. It rests on the strength of our relationships today. It rests on betrayal and forgiveness, through the generations.

We have created a portal here, Easter is a portal, for you to be reminded ... of a faith that has been in you since the beginning, of hope that beckons, of love that is stronger than death itself. Resurrection puts that in perspective, you might say resurrection level-sets our lives. For a person of faith, resurrection means that even our worst past mistakes can be part of future blessings by a living God, who is alive in the world.

Open your eyes, and recognize the tomb is empty, according to the witnesses. Say it with me: Alleluia, Christ is risen! (x2)

Christ is risen, indeed! alleluia!

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