

Sunday April 17, 2022
First Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15: 19-26
Gospel Lesson: Luke 24: 1-12
Sermon Series: Resurrection Effect
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **I have a confession to make to all of you today.**
- Full disclosure I will admit, that I already made this same confession to our 5:30 class that occurs Wednesday nights, Applying the Sermon to Life as well;
- But my confession is that for some reason, Easter/ Resurrection Sunday intimidates me as a preacher and teacher of the faith.
- And this is not entirely because Easter services global wide, are one of the most well attended services of the year, aside from Christmas Eve.
- This is not even because typically there are more new people who may be sitting out in the pews for the very first time;

- Although both of these incidents are overwhelming all in itself, this is not the source of my intimidation.
- For **where the metaphorical cat begins to catch my tongue**, stems from this awareness that even many of you and I together have witnessed throughout various stories within the Bible, where the disciples appear to have struggled with some of the same concepts that I am about to name;
- For this concept of resurrection, is something that seemed difficult for the disciples even then and I would imagine for many of us now to fully comprehend.
- **This idea that a person could die and then come back to life.**
- Our class this past Wednesday spent some time discussing this theme, and it was even revealed in

that space, that the concept of resurrection in many ways, was perplexing for us all.

- In fact, as I reflect on the discussion, it took longer for us to dive into these scriptures and unpack their potential meaning for our lives today, than other passages of scripture.
- For me, even now it seems almost taboo to be in Church, admitting that there are aspects of the resurrection that are difficult to wrap my head around at times.
- For I don't know about you, but I would love to see my loved ones who have passed on reappear — even if just for a moment;
- To see my father's face and hear his voice even for a second in this world, would be incredible!
- Although, I would not want to say goodbye to him all over again, it would still be very meaningful for me to see him... just one more time.

- Furthermore, the truth of the matter is that I haven't really seen my father again since he passed;
- **I felt him...** in fact I feel him all of the time.
- **I have dreams about him..** a couple of times here and there; typically around his birthday and his favorite holiday, Thanksgiving.
- Every time my lights would flicker in my kitchen, along with our built in microwave we have has been going rogue on us, beeping all over the place at random times, leaving just a small part within me if I am honest, thinking **that it is him**, trying to communicate with me and let me know that he is here... even if I am not supposed to admit that here in the Church either, every now and then I still do think like that.

- However, I'll reiterate it again, that I have never actually seen my father again, the way the Bible has described aspects of the resurrection.
- For example, if we look at stories such as the widow of Zarephath's son;
- Where during a time of great drought, the prophet Elijah the Tishbite had been lodging at the house of a widow in Zarephath, a pagan city in Phoenicia. Unexpectedly, the woman's son grew sick and finally stopped breathing. She accused Elijah of bringing God's wrath on her for her sin.
- Carrying the boy to the upper room where he was staying, Elijah laid him on the bed and stretched himself out on the body three times. He cried out to God for the boy's life to return. (1 King 17: 17-24)
- **It is apparent that the boy was resurrected.**
- Or the story of the Shunammite Woman's Son;

- Where Elisha, the prophet after Elijah, stayed in the upper room of a wealthy couple in Shunem. He prayed for the woman to bear a son, and God answered. Several years later, the boy complained of a pain in his head and then died.
- The woman raced to Mount Carmel to Elisha, who sent his servant ahead, but the boy did not respond. Finally, Elisha went to see the dead boy. He cried out to the Lord and laid himself on the dead body, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. The boy's body grew warm, then he sneezed seven times (indicating a perfect work of God) and opened his eyes.
- So again, we see another instance where it is clear, **her son is resurrected.**
- And that is not all, there are countless stories throughout the Bible, Jairus's daughter, Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary—all which makes

it pretty clear that in each story, **a resurrection has occurred.**

- Now leading up to Jesus, who two of our lectionary Gospel readings this week in John 20, Luke 24; our gospel this morning in Luke 24 all reveal that Christ's tomb was empty;
- Now grant you, some of the details from each account are slightly different.
- For instance, in some of the gospels stories only Mary Magdalene is named as first witnessing the empty tomb, or in our gospel today, Mary is with Joanna , Mary the mother of James and the other women;
- However, what is consistent in either account is that **Jesus was indeed not there....the tomb is empty.**

- However, the resurrection at this point begins to not become as clear for the people then and for many of the people now.
- For over the thousand of years since Christ death, there have been a lot of theories of what could have happened to Jesus' body.
- In fact I researched the theories, and theologian Randy Douglass is the one who gets credit for discovering these ten theories to be exact, **of why the tomb was empty**, but I wanted to take a moment to briefly share some of these theories today to aid in our discussion this morning.
- Starting with the **10th theory** and working our way down, **is the Stolen Body Theory**, where some claimed that the disciples or others stole the body of Jesus from the tomb sometime in the night and afterwards began to spread the lie that Jesus had risen from the dead.

- **#9 theory: The Swoon theory** where in this theory that gained traction with “The Passover Plot” book in 1965 and film in 1976. The concept is that Jesus did not die on the cross but rather swooned or fainted. The unconscious body of Jesus was removed from the cross and placed into the tomb. Later, He woke up and got out of the tomb. When the disciples saw Him, they mistakenly thought he had risen from the dead.
- **#8 theory: The Hallucination theory** is where the disciples were so overwhelmed with their grief at the death of Jesus, that they imagined seeing and hearing him after his death.
- **#7 theory: The Mistaken Identity Theory**, that stated that someone else was crucified in place of Jesus either intentionally or unintentionally leaving everyone mistakenly thinking that Jesus was on the cross. I must admit that I giggled at this one,

for how could his own momma not recognize whether or not that was her son...Okay!

- **#6 theory : There is the Copy of a Pagan Myth Theory** where the New Testament writers just copied supposedly the resurrection stories of mythical characters and this theory by the way does not even attempt to explain why the tomb was empty in the first place..... therefore next!
- **#5 theory: The Wrong Tomb Theory** is the theory that says that in their confusion and grief, the women on Easter morning went to the wrong tomb.... And I'm like nope don't like that one because it just makes us women look well... never mind... next!
- **#4 theory: The Twin theory** stated that Jesus had an identical twin who took Jesus place on the cross....let me just keep moving on.

- **# 3 theory: The Alien theory** which I just can't .. I won't even go there.
- **#2 theory: The Contradictions theory** is the disciples made mistakes describing how many angels were at the empty tomb, thus we cannot trust anything they had to say about the resurrection.
- **Finally the #1 theory: the Resurrection theory** states that Jesus did what he predicted and what the Bible proclaims: He rose again from the dead! This is called a "theory" because a theory is a statement of facts to explain a phenomenon, such as the resurrection.
- Therefore scholar Randy Douglass deduced that the only explanation that makes sense of the empty tomb, is that **Jesus truly arose from the dead in full bodily form.**

- And so I too like this scholar who had the same inquisitive mind, rejoice in this knowledge that the tomb was empty, not only because I feel strangely relieved after entertaining some of these other theories that quite frankly doesn't make much sense to me,
- However, over the years of studying these texts and just living my day to day life, I am able to accept in my heart, that the mystery of it all makes the most sense to fully accept, because Church what I do know for certain is this;
- That the words of Jesus in the life he did live on Earth; thirty three years to be exact per most biblical scholars, does reign fully true in my own Christian witness and experience,
- Where as I take us through just a few parables, hopefully the message will become clearer how you and I can begin to trust that the tomb was

empty, thereby embracing the resurrection with a new level of witness and understanding ;

- So let's start with the parable in Matthew 13: 31-32 where it says, The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; **32** it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”
- Then another parable of the yeast in Matthew 13: 33; Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with[d] three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”
- So to put these parables in everyday terms, for me, how you and I begin to understand and embrace this concept of resurrection starts with a mustard seed or similar, where just as the

kingdom grows in our heart, so does the resurrection and all of its potential grow in our hearts.

- Furthermore, why you and I have been spending some time spiritually pruning during our Lenten journey, is simply to make space for the resurrection to begin to really take root in our hearts.
- You see, Matthew 13 for example, begins talking about the different type of metaphorical soil conditions that each of us have.
- Beginning about verse 3 where it says, “Listen! A sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. **5** Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. **6** But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and

since they had no root, they withered away.

7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns

grew up and choked them. **8** Other seeds fell on

good soil and brought forth grain, some a

hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9** Let anyone

with ears[a] listen!”

- You see Church, my personal aha moment, is that life is all about making sure that you and I have good soil conditions, where a seed can be planted within us and grow as a result.
- Furthermore, how you and I maintain good soil conditions is just like in the barren fig tree parable that we have also spent a few weeks on, you and I have to allow the metaphorical gardener to keep tending to our soil, if we wish to grow in our faith.
- **We must allow** our faith to grow, through small groups that focuses on the study of God’s Word and fellowship with one another.

- **We must allow** our faith to grow through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness and what begins to happen in this process is the parables that I have been naming begins to make more sense in our life;
- Continuing on in Mathew 13 that explains the soil parable just a little bit further; verse 10:
- Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” **11** He (Jesus) answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets[b] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. **12** For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. **13** The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not

listen, nor do they understand.’ **14** With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

- ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.
- **15**
- For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.’
- **16** But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and
your ears, for they hear.
- So you see Church, I see how the hymns that we
sing such as, We’ll understand it by and by, how it

begins to make perfect sense if you and I take the time to invest in our faith;

- Where it says

***1. We are tossed and driven
on the restless sea of time;
somber skies and howling tempests
oft succeed a bright sunshine;
in that land of perfect day,
when the mists are rolled away,
we will understand it better by and by.***

Refrain:

***By and by, when the morning comes,
when the saints of God are gathered home,
we'll tell the story how we've overcome,
for we'll understand it better by and by.***

- For it is in these different seasons of our lives where there will be a lot of restlessness;
- However the key to life I have discovered, is for us to not remain idle in those restless moments, but

to keep investing in our spiritual growth **so that we can see better.**

- We must be committed to this spiritual growth process **so that we can hear better.**
- For it occurred to me, that part of the restlessness that comes with life is because you and I were created in the image of God,
- Similar to that of a mustard seed, there is an image that God embedded in each of us like God, that when it is suppressed, that is typically when this restlessness occurs.
- Folks, that is prevenient grace at its finest,
- From the moment you and I were conceived in our mother's womb, God has formed us in God's image, and God's Spirit has been communicating

with our spirit, to come on out and let our light shine;

- Therefore, you and I must keep seeking, keep learning, keep growing and keep responding, simply because the Image of God we were created in, **is eager to come on out.**
- The spiritual gifts that God has instilled within us, **is anxious to come on out.**
- This is why this Resurrection Sunday, I wanted to make space for a few stories to be shared particularly on Easter morning.
- The first, the welcoming of new members six to be exact, and the good news is that two more for sure came forth after our Maundy Thursday service that wants to join our church community and they will be presented at a later time; not to mention there

are others that our new members team are anticipating to join as well.

- However the six individuals that came forth today (or will come forth) today, participated in our new members classes and a number of small groups.
- Most of them started with our Church during the time where the pandemic was at an all time high.
- They have been invested in every opportunity the Church has offered and have allowed their metaphorical soil to be tended to.
- And what a better way to welcome them than on Easter morning, **the resurrection is here!**
- Then we have Sara and Tina for who gave me permission to share on a personal level.

- Sara stepped out on faith and shared that she wanted to be baptized.
- Sara and Tina were both drawn to our church during the pandemic.
- They came to a choir gathering over a year ago, but kept losing the confidence to join both the choir and the church for that matter.
- They were conflicted and I was fortunate to be able to spend a lot of time with them as they explored their faith.
- Sara and Tina shared how the sermon series over these past couple of years ultimately gave them the confidence to come on out and look at them now.... their song together, was a response to Sara's baptism and it was a beautiful thing for us all to witness,

- Another example of the tomb being empty...
another example of the resurrection being alive in
the here and the now and forevermore.
- Church family this and more is what the
resurrection effect is all about.
- It starts out small like a mustard seed about 1 to 2
millimeters in size,
- And when it is placed in the all-powerful Gardener
hands, great things can happen.
- Great things like all we have witnessed today and
will witness in the days to come;
- So this Easter morning I extend this invitation to
you... **to come on out!**
- If this is your first time coming to church, and you
are beginning to feel a restlessness within your

spirit to make this a new start for you and perhaps even your family, then **it's time to come on out!**

- If you have been like a lot of us, isolated from this pandemic and ready to check back into the world in a new way... in a revitalized way... **then come on out!**
- Thinking of the story of Lazarus one more time in his death, there is a story that preachers like to tell in this, that there was a reason why Jesus had to say particularly only Lazarus' name when he called out into the tomb, because if Jesus would have simply said to "come on out," to a tomb filled with resting bodies, then they all would have been raised on that day: (John 11:43)
- Similarly, today I am universally saying to the world "come on out," because it is God's desire for us all to be raised up,

- Come on out... to the families trying to settle into a new routine that is more life giving...
- Come on out... To the one who has been ejected to the margins for whatever the reason.
- Come on out.. to the ones who have been in submersed like Noah's ark, in a flood of all types of concerns, worries, distractions and more, I extend this olive branch twig to you as a symbol of peace and reconciliation and I am making this covenant with you right now that it is safe for you **to come on out!**
- In fact the Church has been waiting just for you to **come on out!**
- We have lots of plans to put in place for the benefit and glory of the kingdom, and we need your help.. **so come on out!**

- For **there is a whole world** who needs to see you.
- **There is a whole world** that has been longing to hear from you.
- The best is yet to come and this declaration includes you and I together, growing and learning as we continue to kiss the Earth with our feet as the Resurrected people that we are!
- Let anyone with ears listen... **Come on out!**
(Matthew 11:15)
- For Christ the Lord is Risen Today!