

Thankful Memorial, Chattanooga
April 17, 2022
Year C, Easter Day
An Idle Tale?
The Rev. Leyla King

Isaiah 65:17-25
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43
Luke 24:1-12

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever noticed that in many of the gospel accounts of Easter Day, that first morning after the resurrection, Jesus is nowhere to be found? Take today's story from Luke's gospel. There are many characters: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, additional unnamed women, two angels, and all the male disciples, including Peter. All these participate in the earliest part of the Easter story, but no Jesus. In some gospels, the risen Lord *does* appear to some few during the course of this day and in the 50 days to follow before his ascension, but for now, for Luke, there is only the empty tomb and all these other folks.

It's a funny little narrative twist that, in this moment that we think of being all about the risen Jesus, Luke's gospel points out that Easter, after all, is about us. It's about an invitation *to us* to respond to the empty tomb and the truth to which that emptiness points.

And we see all sorts of responses in Luke's gospel. Those very first apostles, the women, are initially "terrified" and confused when they confront the emptiness of the tomb and the angels in "dazzling clothes." But, quickly, they "remembered [Jesus'] words." They remember what Jesus said, what he did, what he promised, and they dare to believe, to wonder and to share the good news with others.

But not everyone is so quick to move from doubt to belief. When the women tell what they saw and heard and what they have "remembered" to the eleven men who were closest to Jesus and "all the rest" of his followers, the story the women tell, the truth they share seems to the others "an idle tale."

An idle tale. Honestly? I'm with these guys. When I imagine myself into this story, I find myself right here, with "all the rest." It *does* seem like an idle tale. The resurrection. The idea that death is overcome. That violence and unrest don't win. That's hard to believe these days.

When the Russian offensive is just gearing up for another vicious attack on Ukraine and soldiers commit atrocities against innocent civilians; when the conflict in Eastern Europe is just one of oh so many stories of violence and tragedy, human greed and lust for power doing damage to innocent lives; when folks on the margins here at home because of their gender or race or sexual orientation face assaults on their civil rights and their human dignity; when the gaps between rich and poor, right and left grow to their extremes and no one seems interested in finding common ground; when the pandemic just won't end.; how can we make sense of the Easter story as anything other than an "idle tale"?

And when, against the broken backdrop of such global tragedies, we struggle with the challenges of our own lives; when we have faced the loss of our loved ones and now live with the emptiness that they left behind; when we minister sacrificially to someone dear whose health is deteriorating before our eyes; when we grapple with our own physical decline or mental health issues every day; when we

must learn, over and over again, how to move forward through the chaos of busy-ness that has crept back into our lives; when we are faced with the onslaught of a hundred little daily decisions that we each have to make and none of them seems good; when we so constantly feel tired, exhausted, angry or apathetic because of circumstances not of our own choosing; when, some days, despair seems only a hair's breadth away; how, *how*, can this Easter story be anything to us other than an "idle tale"?

And yet... and yet... What if it's not?

What if the invitation of this Easter Day – of every day – is to come to belief as the women did? As all of Jesus' followers – maybe even including us – eventually do? What if, like Peter, who in his unbelief, runs to the tomb and goes home amazed, what if, like Peter, we allow ourselves to doubt our doubt – for just a moment? What would happen if, today, we took hold of those words from Isaiah, the promise that, *even now*, even in the midst of it all, God is creating "new heavens and a new earth" where "the former things shall not be remembered" and God's people live in and as God's "delight"? Or, with the Psalmist, we proclaimed, despite it all, "*I shall not die, but live* and declare the works of the Lord"?

What if we heard these words from our scriptures, these words that the women tell about resurrection, not as an idle tale but as the statement of a truth that lives beneath the surface of our broken lives and *dared* to believe?

What if the invitation of this Easter Day, 2022, after all we have been through together as communities, as families, as individuals, what if the invitation of Luke's gospel today is to *us*, to you and me, in the reality we find ourselves in right now – to wonder, perhaps, at first, in just a whisper in our inmost hearts: Alleluia? Christ is risen? And to let the wonder grow... Alleluia: death does not get the final word? Alleluia. We are created as God's great joy and delight. Alleluia. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Alleluia. "On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Alleluia.

Until we can see and hear the truth of this tale that is anything but idle, until we know it and believe it in our very bodies and the depths of our souls and can proclaim it joyfully aloud as the women did: "Alleluia! Christ *is* risen! The Lord *is* risen indeed! Alleluia!"