

Primary Text: Luke 24.1-12

Alleluia! Christ is Risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

“Now that he is safely dead let us praise him, for dead men make such convenient heroes, they can not rise up to challenge the images we fashion for them. Besides, it’s easier to build a monument than it is a Movement.”

These words originally referred to that *modern* Christ-like figure Martin Luther King, Jr. However, as we remember and celebrate this morning the resurrection of that *original* Christ-like figure, I think they raise important questions...

After all, they weren’t carrying granite blocks to build a monument to memorialize their dead leader. The women in our reading from Luke went to grieve a dead body. These women, walking in the early dawn to the tomb, carried fresh and heavy grief upon their bodies like stones strapped onto backs... each step, a step stuck in grief like feet walking through tar... with every step this fresh and heavy grief... these memories of Jesus: teacher, healer, leader, friend... but mostly, these fresh and heavy memories of death. Hands nailed. A cross. Crucifixion...

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...down to the tomb. These women expect to find more weight. They expect a monumental stone awaiting their tired arms to remove...

Take this story. Can you peel it off of the pages of the bible and lay it over your own life... What fresh and heavy burdens do you carry? Is there grief? Do you carry physical pain – tired legs or burning arthritis? Or do you carry mental anguish – anxiety, depression? Or are the fresh and heavy burdens you carry broken relationships? Lost friends? divorce? Or is the fresh and heavy burden you carry a simple lack of self-love? Do you wish to trade in this body of yours for one with less fat or more muscle or less pimples or more hair?

Or have you grown accustomed to the weight of your burdens? Has the fresh tar of grief or a broken relationship turned into stagnant defeat? Has the stony burden on your back slowly turned your heart into stone?

Peel off the story from the pages of the bible and hear it again... “But...” the story continues... *“But they found the stone rolled away...”* Suddenly fresh and heavy grief turns to fear. We might ask which is a greater miracle that God rolls away a stone from in front of a tomb, or that God breaks up hearts of stone with awe and amazement...

...and a weightless *question that smells of Easter lilies – Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Peel the story back with me. Peel it away like the back of wallpaper. Let’s walk down to the graveyard of *our fear and pessimism* and look with me at the stones that guard our burdens.

Can you see that it’s been moved away? Watch your head, bend your knees, and climb inside the tomb of your burden. I know that it might be painful, but... Listen to the question again and hear it ring through the burden you carry: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Don’t you remember what Jesus told you...

I remember a conversation a few weeks ago with a person who’s grief was still fresh and heavy from her husband’s death just a few months before... At one point in the conversation she joked about heaven. You see, a well-meaning friend of hers had told her that in heaven, things would be much different. There wouldn’t be bodies. There’d only be spirits floating around... Perhaps not too different from how many of us might envision an after-life.

But this woman taught me about lives crying out for resurrection as she spoke through her grief as fresh as tar and as heavy as a monument. She said, “If that’s what heaven is, I don’t want to go there. Not if we’re just disconnected souls or spirits... If I can’t feel my husband’s arms embracing me – then it won’t be any sort of heaven I want to hope for.”

This, I think, is why our world cries out for resurrection... why our relationships yearn for resurrection... why our lives are desperately strain for resurrection with every muscle. As much as we strive for something better than flesh and bones – as much as we’d like to transcend the pain of bodies, and the brokenness of relationships... it’s all we’ve got and all we know in this world. Hands and hugs. Legs and toes. Smiles and smells...

And this God of ours – who has been to death and back... This God knows that these bodies are all we've got. This God isn't some amateur magician who seems to bring us *from life to something more than life*... This God is a *living presence* who brings us *from something less than life to the fullness of life*.

Let me say it another way... this living presence – this God who has been to death and back again – doesn't wave a wand over a hat and pull out an Easter bunny that makes our problems and our pain and our bodies just disappear. This God who has been to death and back works like a massage therapist with skilled hands working *with us* through painful knots in broken hearts.....

But let's be honest, *it's easier to build a monument than it is a movement*. It's easier to worship an empty tomb than it is to work through the confusion, the awe, the mystery – to “practice resurrection” as one poet calls it. It's easier to *praise* a dead and distant God, *for a dead and distant God makes such a convenient hero, a dead and distant God can't rise up to challenge the images we fashion for it*.....

“Hope is the same thing as remembering” says a philosopher. So let us remember with hopeful hearts this God who refuses to be beat down by injustice and suffering. Let us remember this God revealed to us through this Jesus who from the beginning was always about healing and teaching; loving and forgiving.

So, we remember with hopeful hearts and we recommit ourselves not to praise a dead man who makes a convenient hero. We recommit ourselves to a *God who on the best of days is a Living Presence*... A God who started a movement at the beginning of creation and even now is rolling away stones that burden all creation: stones of injustice, stones of pain, and stones of hatred... Filling our hearts and lives instead with love, healing, and life.

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