

Luke 24:1-12
Easter Sunday 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

(Luke 24:11) This verse continued to catch my eye every time I read through our gospel text this week. Some translations use the term, “idle tale,” such as the New Revised Standard Version we just read from, while others translate it “nonsense.” These very first followers of Jesus, those closest to him who have traveled with him, shared meals with him, had been taught by him, watched the miracles he performed, and have had the luxury of witnessing it all first-hand now hear straight from the mouths of these faithful women that Jesus’ dead body is no longer in the tomb. He is risen. They hear it but they don’t believe it. These women are out of their minds to have concocted such a ridiculous and absurd tale. *(Pause)* Come on guys! Why can’t you grasp it? For three years you have been with this man. He has told you over and over again what was going to happen; how he would be betrayed. How we would be mocked, beaten, shamed, and undergo a brutal and humiliating death by the powers that be. And how he would rise again on the third day. Why can’t they get it through their thick skulls? If his closest companions can’t get it, what hope do we have?

There is great comfort in how Luke penned his account of our Lord’s resurrection. Each gospel writer tells it in a slightly different way. Personally, I am grateful Luke adds

this line, “But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

At times, don’t we all struggle to comprehend the Easter miracle? Truthfully, a dead man rising from his tomb to new life. Things like that just don’t happen. It defies all human logic and understanding. Yet, in this one verse, we find so much good news. This one verse is pure gospel and in and of itself is resurrection news. This verse gives us the freedom to readily admit this is not an easy message to grasp. It is perfectly normal to come today with some doubt, perplexity, and even disbelief. Even those faithful women who arrived at the tomb and found it empty were initially perplexed. They too, were befuddled, astonished, and left comprehending what was before their very eyes. They, too, needed divine intervention in the form of two angelic figures to help them in their disbelief and remind them of what Jesus had told them. And then, in the midst of all they were experiencing, their confusion, fear, awe, God used them to be the very first voices to proclaim this amazing news to those eleven disciples (and others) huddled away in their own fear and possibly guilt of denying and abandoning Jesus. And then those first disciples who deemed these words ludicrous. Did God give up on them? Did the risen Christ abandon them just as they had so earlier done to him? Did he simply leave them wallowing in their disbelief? No, he came to them. He reminded them of his words. He calmed their fears, helped overcome their doubts, and then sent them to proclaim this very same message, “Christ has died. Christ has risen.” These disciples whose faith had been dashed away, whose minds couldn’t see beyond their

sorrow of his death, beyond their fears of how they would move forward, beyond their guilt of how they had deserted him – the risen Christ met them and gave them new life, new hope. He didn't abandon them for their failure. He didn't punish them for their lack of faith. No, just as he had always done - he continued to love them. He continued to forgive them. He continued to draw them closer to himself. He continued to trust in them to do the work he had called them to do. He continued to believe in them and instill in them the wisdom, power, and confidence to believe, trust, and be filled with the water that gushes forth new and abundant life. This Jesus, their Lord and Savior – our Lord and Savior, has risen from the dead. He has pushed the boundaries of all human understanding. After all, this very real human Jesus is also fully God and God is beyond anything we can fully grasp in our earthly bodies.

So how does this all apply to us? As people of the resurrection. As people who continue to wonder about all this. As people who at times struggle comprehending whether this is actually true and makes a difference. As people who at times abandon and deny Jesus and put our trust and hope in something or someone, which ultimately will let us down. As people who question why or how God could be using us. Perhaps, you don't wrestle with these things. However, my hunch is we, if truly open and honest with ourselves, struggle at some point with our faith. I know I sure do and I often ponder why God would choose to work through me. I really am not all that smart or creative or musical or have great leadership abilities or am an eloquent speaker and I

certainly am not always an example others should look up to or follow. I am broken and full of sin just as we all are and come here this morning in desperate need of God's grace. Yet, then it hits me and that is the power of the resurrection and the Easter miracle. God's grace abounds and overflows. God's ability to do the impossible shines through. God's power to work through all the baggage we carry is amazing. The Spirit's ability to transform our disbelief into belief. The risen Christ continues to come to us and meet us right where we are be it times of joy or sorrow. Times of great faith or times when our faith is at best the size of a mustard seed. Times of awe and times of fear. Times of hope and times of despair. He is there and he promises us new life – not just at some distant point in the future – but new life here and now that we grasp onto, that we can taste and see (in the Lord's Supper), that we can feel splashed upon our foreheads in the water (of baptism), that we can hear as it is proclaimed (through God's word), and even this morning that we can smell through the beautiful, white lilies which adorn our space. New life in the face of brokenness and sin. New life in the waters of baptism. New life through the gift of his body and blood given for each of us. New life in the unconditional promise of forgiveness through his death and resurrection. New life not having to worry about obtaining our own salvation. New life not having to meet the demands of a wrathful God. New life of entering more fully into a relationship with a loving God. New life of knowing we are good enough just as we are and just as God created us to be. New life in seeing death will never have the last say. New life in the

power of God to do the impossible and transform even the ugliest of situations, horrors, and injustices. New life in the hope that springs eternal life through this empty tomb we encounter this morning. New life through Christ's cross as God gathers up our sin and brokenness into God's own self and transform that death into life. As ELCA pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber writes, "Jesus takes our crap and exchanges it for his blessedness."ⁱ The new life we have in Christ is a breath of fresh air that once again fills our lungs with God's goodness, grace, and forgiveness. An Easter miracle that meets us today, tomorrow, and every day. "New life that helps us see more clearly, believe more confidently, and shout out more loudly, "Christ is risen. Alleluia!"

ⁱ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints Finding God in All the Wrong People* (Convergent Books, 2015; p. 18)