

“Re-member”  
Sermon by Oby Ballinger  
Easter Sunday  
Edina Morningside Community Church; April 4, 2021

**Luke 24:1-12**

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

Rev. Dr. Emily C. Heath, a friend and colleague serving a UCC church in New England, posted on Twitter as the pandemic first began last year. Emily wrote: *The first Easter didn't happen at a church. It happened outside of an empty tomb, while all the disciples were sequestered in a home, grief-stricken and wondering what was going on. So, we're all going to be keeping things pretty Biblical this #Easter.* One year on, the pandemic is waning but it's not over yet, and many of us carry similar feelings of anxiety, grief and loss. A biblical Easter, indeed.

The Gospel accounts of resurrection are more subtle and mysterious than our customary twenty-first century Easter-paloozas, overflowing as they usually are with crowds, lilies and brass instruments. In Luke's gospel narrative, there's not even a resurrected Christ who appears. There are dazzling messengers, hearsay reports, and some linen clothes, but we don't see the resurrected body of Jesus anywhere. All we have is a stone rolled away, an empty tomb, and the women as witnesses, but they are not believed.

What *is* believed instead of resurrection—what is unmistakable then and now—is the evidence of cruel, arbitrary, and untimely death. You cannot live in the Cities right now without hearing the name of George Floyd, and remembering his awful, undeserved death at the hands of the state. The possibility of gun violence hides around every street corner, in grocery stores, and in other public spaces. The ever-increasing count of those who have died from Covid will not be forgotten even as vaccines gradually reduce our daily death counts. Heartsickness at death, and anxiety at the diseases that lead to it, put us in the same place as those grief-stricken women visiting the tomb.

The pastoral counselor Andrew Lester describes how grief is made worse by the loss of [what he calls a “future story”](#). We go through life with some sense of what the future will hold: a child will graduate and one day get married, hard work at a job will lead to promotions, or that love—once found—will last for a lifetime. These future stories act as markers on the horizon, given assumptions that guide our thoughts and actions each day. But every so often these future stories cannot hold any longer—the future breaks. When a child comes out as queer, the future stories we've been imagining about their wedding day must change. When a fall and a broken hip mean we can't live at home any more, our imagined future of family gatherings there will no longer come true. When a pandemic means we can no longer safely talk, hug, sing, or worship as we used to, we lose our assumption that church will always be like it has always been. And when the “savior of the world” dies on a cross, all the hoped-for scenes of his victory—over Caesar, over disease, poverty, violence and death—are apparently dead as well. Losing “future stories” leads to bewilderment and grief, in part because we

have lost our bearings on the horizon and don't know where to turn next. We ask ourselves, "now what", and begin the hard work of envisioning a *new* future story that reflects the new facts and circumstances.

But human beings are resilient, and by God's grace we *do* find new future stories. We see this in the women at the tomb, and the disciple Peter who comes later. When the crucifixion and then the empty tomb shatter expectations of life and death, the dazzling messengers who speak to the women help them start envisioning life with a risen Savior rather than a dead Messiah. Could it be that he is among the living and not the dead? "Remember?" they say. "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." That's such a key word here—"remember"—and I love that it can be separated: "re-member", which is the opposite of "dis-member". "Re-member", bring together again, create a new future story.

"Then [the women] remembered his words", we read. He *IS* raised, just as he told them he would be—and an otherwise unbelievable new future story open up before them. The future story changes because an empty tomb and divine messengers call them to remember the words and actions of Christ: that healing comes to the blind and despairing, that the poor will be blessed, that those who grieve will be comforted, that love of God, neighbor and self has transformative power beyond any human imagining. Easter's resurrection opens our eyes to see anew, to glimpse the life that once appeared impossible. Because Christ is alive, suffering and grief are *not* inevitable, nor is death the ultimate reality. Even when the threats of death hang over the world, Easter points to God at work right there in the face of death itself. As the poet [Mary Oliver has written](#), "I don't ask for the sights in front of me to change, only the depth of my seeing."

What is the "future story" that has been broken in you, and what new futures are you working to see more deeply now? Can we recognize the living God at work with hidden transformations here and now? Can we see the birdsong and green shoots of spring for what they are, metaphors of God's enduring, ever-living presence in even the harshest winter? Can we trust that the world is not bereft but beloved by God, who still holds this feverish world with loving arms and healing hands? Can we let our eyes pass through all the places of death, and see even there God's power of resurrection and redemption?

This is Easter faith, the "future story" that God wants for us today. It's not easy to believe, and nobody does it perfectly all the time. (Doubts and confusion are welcome too; they're part of what it means to be human.) But with Easter we let the what-ifs of transformation and the "brave new world" sit alongside our doubts, and maybe, today, let them have the upper hand. We re-member our faith with the women at the tomb, with hope and trust that something new, something deeper, someone Beyond here, is at work amid all the ragged, terrible sorrows. Life—and not death—is the ultimate last word.

So whatever this Easter day, or Easter week, or Easter season bring to you, may you have moments where joy, possibility and resurrection catch you off guard and invite you into a more generous, hopeful and new future. May you discover the open-hearted magic of Lucille Clifton describes in her poem "Spring Song":

*the green of Jesus  
is breaking the ground  
and the sweet  
smell of delicious Jesus*

*is opening the house and  
the dance of Jesus music  
has hold of the air and  
the world is turning  
in the body of Jesus and  
the future is possible*

Christ is risen! Alleluia, and amen.