

“Always a Surprise”

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Reflections for Easter Sunday

Luke 24

April 12, 2020

Please read Luke 24:1-29. If you're reading this online, you can see this Scripture selection [by clicking here](#).

We are celebrating Christ's resurrection . . . imperfectly.¹

The sanctuaries are not packed. Not a creature is stirring, except maybe a mouse.

No choir will sing a cantata. That makes the music we do hear today even more of a gift — Ink, Brad, Betty and Megan, thank you.

We did not gather down by the river to pray, not this morning. No pancakes afterwards either.

Easter bonnets, dressed up for display, would be wasted today.

This is an Easter morning to muddle through.

Maybe that will help us understand better what happened that resurrection day.

They were muddling through too, weren't they.

Luke the narrator fills in the obvious, so we don't miss it:

“They didn't know what to make of this” — the women disciples who'd discovered the tomb empty.

Those words *“struck . . . as nonsense, and they did not believe the women”* — the men disciples, who didn't see the point in looking themselves.

¹ This particular Easter took place during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Strong measures were in place to stop the virus' spread, including requiring people to keep physical distance from those outside their families. Public events, including gathering for worship services, were cancelled. So we worshipped online.

Except Peter (and maybe another)² who went, saw, and left “*wondering what had happened.*”

Later, the two on the road. They had heard all of this, been left “*stunned,*” and “. . . *stopped, their faces downcast.*” Should they tell this curious, clueless stranger who’s come across them? Admit they’d been following Jesus, who had just been condemned for sedition and executed for treason? Caution and suspicion would seem wise. Whatever, they told their fellow traveller everything. Then, he called them “*Foolish!*”

How many of us have felt foolish, at least more foolish than normal, these umpteen days? Something big is happening, and we don’t really know what is going on, and wonder if anyone does. All of this, because of a microscopic virus.

How much more foolish are we then, when we are encountered by this sketchy, surprising, fearful, astonishing, confusing report that a brutalized body, a cold corpse, a mourned man has burst back through Death’s bolted door, to live again?

Something very odd is happening.

Please read Luke 24:29-35.
Online, you can see the Scripture selection [here](#).

This story is most memorable. Maybe because theirs can be a pattern for our own stories, of disappointment and discovery.³

Begin with our own hopes, crushed or, at very least, confused. We stumble along, going somewhere, getting nowhere. Emmaus is not too far from Jerusalem. Still, going there, they expect they are leaving Jesus behind. “*We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. . . . but they crucified him.*”

Someone comes along. We start telling our story. Maybe they can help.

We don’t understand, not yet. Still, as we go, there is a dawning recognition, a still-to-be-born realization, that things are on the verge of making sense.

² John 20 tells us that it was Peter and “the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved” who ran to the tomb after hearing Mary Magdalene’s story.

³ See N. T. Wright, Luke for Everyone (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 2004), 293.

Then we are given to see: Jesus himself, the Holy Presence. He was always walking with us. Now we wonder how we hadn't noticed. That's the thing. We won't, not until he chooses for us to see.

So, bring whatever is breaking you, on the road with you. Take a companion — literally that means “someone to break bread with” — a companion of compassion — literally that means “someone to suffer with” — a companion of compassion to share the journey is always good.

In some guise or another, the Holy Stranger will join you. Yes, God can be a Stranger to you (though you are never, ever a stranger to God!) You might not expect anything from the prayerful conversation. Your expectations don't matter much, not nearly as much as the Stranger's hopes for you.

Dig into the Scriptures and let the Holy Spirit show you and set your soul alight.

When the time is right, may your eyes be opened. Perhaps it will happen when you open your table for someone who needs a place to eat. Yes, even when physically-distancing, you can still be hospitable. You never know when Jesus will show up.

After all, Death could not stop him. Do you think you will?

Now you can finish the story, and Luke's Gospel,
by reading Luke 24:36-53!
Online, you'll find this last selection [here](#).

They were as perplexed as we are, probably more so. No one had imagined that someone would be stone-cold, torn-apart dead, *then* come back alive. Now they were trying to describe him, Jesus. It was clearly him. He was most-definitely alive. He was flesh-and-bone, as physical as you and I are, maybe more so. Yet he was also spirit-like. He was the same as before, and more than before.

That's resurrection. It's not simply a way of saying that, when we die, some part of us — call it our “soul” — will live forever in God's Presence. That's true enough, but resurrection promises more. Everything that is who you are, your body and your soul, will live again, in God's eternity. *You* will live again, by God's power and grace and love. All God's good creation will live again: God's new heaven and new earth.

Resurrection. Can't wrap your mind about it? Don't worry. Who can? Still, it is God's plan

and God's promise, which makes it wonderfully good.

Here is the point of it. A new beginning, for us and our world. God's new beginning that does not give up on everything, but sees God redeeming all, transforming all, and making all things new.

That's why the Risen Jesus talks about "repentance" (or, "change of heart") and "forgiveness of sins." These are God's gifts of turning. Turning from the worn-out, broken, sinful, destructive, cruel and corrosive ways that only bring destruction. Turning to God, and how God is bringing us into new ways, new life.

Resurrection.

Those first disciples saw Jesus begin it. Now, we continue with him, seeing the resurrection he is living now.

Yes, even during *this* imperfect Easter, as we're muddling through. Yes, because this is the sort of thing that is ideal for Christ the Lord, who is risen today!

Amen.