

Luke 24: ¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² 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.

March 27, 2016
Easter Sunday

An Idle Tale?

Luke 24:1-12

I cannot imagine the disappointment Mary Magdalene and the other women felt after coming to the tomb, finding it open and empty, and suddenly two men in dazzling garments asking startling questions like, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" What? What living? Who living? We saw them put his corpse in this tomb!

"He is not here," the angels continue. "He is risen. Remember? He told you this was going to happen."

They do remember, and in their astonishment and excitement and fear, they run to tell Peter and the other disciples. The words must have tumbled out like a stream rushing down a mountain.

He's alive!

There were angels!

They said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen!"

This is what he said back in Galilee!

Jesus is alive!

Peter and the others stand there, listening, looking at each other, suspense building, and then they say, "We don't believe you. It's all just an idle tale."

Literally, the Greek word means "nonsense" and it is most often used to describe people who are mad... crazy... incapable of telling fantasy from reality.

Why? Why do these men who have heard Jesus say multiple times this was going to happen, why do they think these women, whom they have known nearly as long as they have known Jesus, are suddenly incapable of differentiating between fantasy and reality?

Surely part of the reason is that we men have always done that to women. We still do. We can be as closed-minded to the truth the women in our lives have to share with us as Peter and the men were to Mary Magdalene and the other women.

But that's only part of the reason. I think we generally dismiss as madness most everything that doesn't fit the way we see the world. Truth is, if we had been there, without the benefit of 2,000 years' hindsight, we probably would have thought the same thing. Nonsense. Madness. Pure fantasy.

In fact, we do it now.

We find rational explanations for Jesus' miracles.

- The feeding of the 5,000 was just people being moved to share their food with each other.

We put medical diagnoses on things the Bible calls demon possession.

- The convulsing boy in Mark 9 clearly had epilepsy;
- The demoniac in Mark 5 with the legion of voices in his head was obviously schizophrenic.
- And most of those miraculous healings plainly display the power of suggestion. Jesus says you're healed and your brain heals you!

And talk of demons and devils, evil powers and dark forces? They may exist in Star Wars movies, but not in real life.

We understand Peter and the others because we are Peter and the others. We get skeptical when people start with talk of miracles and angels and spirits. And who can blame us when we've been taught since first grade that seeing, counting, measuring, and proving is the only way to know anything?

Who can blame us in an age when the most brilliant scientists say that the physical world is all there is, and one day someone will come up with one big theory of everything that will explain every mystery and answer every question? It's hard enough these days just to believe in God, much less to believe in risen corpses and dazzling angels. We understand Thomas's insistence on seeing and touching the risen Lord. That's the scientific method right there – tangible, visible, quantifiable.

So, with all of that drummed into our brains, the fact that you are even here this morning is amazingly counterintuitive! What are you doing here? This goes against everything you've been taught. This is madness!

Erin sent me a quote from a preaching professor this week, as a means of encouraging me in a week with two sermons to write. It said, "*Preach like you know they almost didn't come.*" I know it's true! He is risen? Pure madness!

So, why are you here? I know why. Because, in spite of hundreds of years of developing Enlightened Western minds to believe that there is only one way to know anything: by proving it in a lab with

observable, measurable results that are consistent over time, there is still some part of our minds – let's be bold and call it our *souls* – that still understands that there are other ways of knowing besides seeing and hearing and touching and tasting and smelling. In spite of all those scientists who believe nothing is real except what is proven – which, by the way, is a faith statement, not a fact – something inside of us *knows* that there are *other* ways of *knowing*, too.

I'm not saying that science is not valid. Heck, if it weren't for science figuring out a way to make a kidney from someone else's body work in mine to keep me alive, I wouldn't even be here! But what I am saying is that more and more people are coming to the realization that scientific knowing is *one* kind of knowing, but not the *only* kind of knowing there is.

For instance, science can't explain...

Why a song moves you to tears...

Why a sunset makes you feel inner peace...

Why flowers make us feel romantic...

Why *anyone* would write poetry...

And why do we keep having the feeling that life has meaning and our lives have purpose, if all we are is tiny life forms on a blue marble?

And, why does Peter run to the tomb after he has just told the women they are talking nonsense? Did you catch that?

Peter gets up and runs to the tomb right after telling the women they are crazy.

In the midst of our doubt, we still wonder if it might just be possible after all.

In the midst of our skepticism, we still hold out hope that miracles might just happen after all.

Perhaps that's why Jesus called Peter the rock on which he would build his church – because, in spite of everything in him that said it was madness, he ran – he didn't walk, he *ran* – to see if it just might be true.

Frederick Buechner had this to say about those who insist that this physical universe is all there is: *"For a human being to say that the cosmos is all there is strikes me as like a worm in an apple saying that the apple is all there is...because we know as surely as we know anything that, though we have never seen it... our true home lies somewhere else. [This is] the ultimate madness the church is built upon...or the ultimate sanity."*¹

It is a kind of madness to say that some things are sacred.

It is a kind of madness to say that some things are holy.

It is a kind of madness to believe that some mysteries will always be mysteries and that there will never be a proven theory of everything that rules out the need for God.

It is a kind of madness to say that people are made in the image of God...

that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...

and that angels stood beside the women asking,

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen."

But then, if you have a favorite song,

If you have find peace in a sunset,

If you love the ocean, or the mountains, or a rocky coastline,

If you *love* at all,

You already know that some things can't be understood by looking at them under a microscope, and some things the world calls madness are really the ultimate sanity.

Like running to the tomb in spite of being certain it is all just an idle tale.

Like coming to church on Easter Sunday.

Like saying it right out loud in spite of all the question marks in your head that...

Jesus Christ is risen.

And all the people said, "He is risen, indeed!"

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¹ Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, pp. 77-78.