



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“WHAT IF?”:
EASTER DAY—11:15 SERVICE

ISAIAH 65:17-25
PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24
ACTS 10:34-43
JOHN 20:1-8

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY
APRIL 17, 2022

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and “the other women” take the customary spices to Jesus’ grave to override the smell of the tomb in the hot climate. The ancient Hebrews did not embalm their dead. Burial was within 24 hours and decomposition would begin immediately.

The women obviously expect to find Jesus’ body. They are confused and fearful when two messengers announce Jesus is risen. When the women tell the male disciples, they are not believed. “An idle tale”, Luke says. Wishful thinking. All those things that are said. Can’t handle reality without magical thinking. (“...Religion is just a crutch for the weak....”) We too may have dismissed witnesses in our lives. Witnesses to something essential; witnesses to love; witnesses to injustice; people we have not believed who are telling us something strange and new. The witness of the women to the risen Christ is dismissed.

Then there is a gap. Something causes Peter to question himself. Something makes Peter doubt his doubts. What if...? He *runs* back to the tomb. Suddenly this question becomes the most urgent thing in his life. What he discovers changes him forever.

Where does faith begin? In the New Testament, Peter and Paul are often held up as contrasting examples of faith journeys. For Paul, faith in the risen Jesus begins in a dramatic encounter on the Damascus Road. But for Peter, faith in the risen Jesus starts here, second-guessing himself. Peter's self-doubt is God's invitation. Peter's what if *is* the risen Jesus inviting him to *Come and see* for himself. Notice that when Peter dismisses the women's story he is part of the male disciples' "group override": "an idle tale". But when Peter questions himself, he does it *alone*. In Luke's gospel no-one goes *with* Peter to the tomb and Peter doesn't invite anyone to go with him. This is *his* personal journey. Luke adds that when he finds the tomb is empty, Peter doesn't run to tell the

others, he goes home. Peter needs to make sense of it himself first. This is a new beginning for Peter.

For three years, Peter has had Jesus near, beside him, in the flesh. After Jesus dies, Peter is in the same boat as the rest of us. His faith really becomes faith this morning. As Hebrews puts it: *[F]aith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1)

Where does faith begin for us? We can start with “what if”? like Peter, with curiosity, with questions. None of us can fully understand what happened at the Resurrection. Peter certainly didn’t. The gospel writers don’t either; the Resurrection itself isn’t described by any of them. Complete understanding or certainty is not a requirement for our spiritual life. Faith is a journey, not a destination.

A friend of mine says that when he is listening to someone’s spiritual journey, he listens for the holes. The holes are those places where something life-changing happens to us that cannot be fully explained. Meeting

our life partner and just knowing deep down that this is “the one”. A chance invitation that we say Yes to that ends up taking us on a completely different life path. My friend calls these “God spots”. This doesn’t mean God micromanages our lives. It does mean that God is always present in our everyday lives, working through ordinary events to offer us greater joy and greater love. Sometimes, we almost accidentally say Yes. Sometimes we don’t recognize that it is God’s grace coming to us.

For me, the meaning of the Resurrection in our life now is that God’s life is not separate from our life, it is always connected. God’s love revealed so powerfully in the Resurrection of Jesus is the source of our capacity to love. When we find human love, we are connecting with God’s infinite love in a way that we can understand and receive and delight in.

Resurrection is possible even in the dead places of our lives, where we have buried those things of which we are afraid or ashamed. Peter knows all about shame – denying Jesus three times. Peter knows all about fear –

deserting Jesus in Jesus' hour of greatest need. Yet the risen Jesus seeks him out in love and forgiveness. What if our desolate tombs can be filled with light and healing instead of darkness and suffering? Jesus' promise to us this morning is that those tombs can be opened and old wounds healed.

The truth is, our journey of faith can begin from anywhere. We think we seek God – and we do - but it is nothing compared to God's search for us. God is always calling us to notice him. Everywhere. To see God in each other, in the beauty of Spring and the joy of children in the Easter bunny. Every human joy comes from God and God delights in our delight. God wants to give us more joy than our hearts can hold.

What the Resurrection of Jesus means is that there is more love in the world than we can even imagine and there always will be. It is an explosion of love. God's love is never defeated, even in death. We may be exhausted. We may be at the end of our strength, but God is not. God is always pouring love and hope into the world

through Creation, through the gift of each other,
through the Resurrected Jesus. *Alleluia, Christ is Risen!*

AMEN

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