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*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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 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. 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.’ Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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.*

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Although we’ve been traveling this Lenten journey through the eyes of Peter, when it comes to Easter Sunday, and any account of the resurrection, we can’t begin with Peter. Instead, we have to begin with the women. Because they show up. In Luke’s account, we’re told that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women whose names we don’t know showed up at the tomb with precious spices. Only they did not find the body for whom those spices were intended. And at that, the text tells us, they were perplexed.

Now the Greek word for “perplexed” is άπορέω (aporeo), which can also be translated as “to be at a loss.”

And I actually really love that about Easter. You see, biblically speaking, Easter doesn’t begin with Widor’s Toccata, exuberant bells, alleluias in four-part harmony, or Easter baskets filled with tasty treats. Rather, according to the text, Easter begins “at a loss.” Maybe you know that feeling. You know what it feels like to be at a loss. At a loss for words to describe why we cling to this resurrection thing when so much in the world around us seems to exhibit anything but. At a loss for meaning when you’ve been through so much hardship and trauma. At a loss for joy if this is your first Easter after saying goodbye to a loved one. At a loss for peace after yet another setback, another unexpected bill, another broken relationship. At a loss for why you’re even here today.

If you know what it feels like to be at a loss, you’re in good company. You’re in good company with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women whose names we don’t know. Easter begins with fear, uncertainty, bewilderment, confusion, and - according to the text - even terror. That in and of itself is a beautiful message: that resurrection doesn’t wait for us to put on our Sunday best to show up. Resurrection doesn’t wait for the choir to warm up, or the toddler to sit still, or for all four verses of “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today” to be sung. No, resurrection shows up when everything has gone to hell in a hand basket. Resurrection shows up in our most tender moments of vulnerability. Resurrection has no litmus test that one must pass in order to interrupt our lives and pull us out of the graves that we dig for ourselves.

And so, in their moment of being “at a loss,” in their time of terror and confusion, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women whose names we don't know are visited by two holy messengers with a rather perplexing question and statement: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” If the angels were looking for something to assuage the women’s feelings of being “at a loss,” this wasn't it. And yet, the women listen and are given an important verb: remember. They are called to *remember* that Jesus himself said that this would happen. They are called to do the sacred work we do each and every time we break bread at the Lord’s Super: we do this *in remembrance* of him. And, as all good remembrances do, they compel us to act.

And Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women whose names we don’t know do just that. Without so much as a “goodbye” the women flee the empty tomb and find the male disciples to tell them what they witnessed. The text doesn’t give us the details of how exactly they explained this story to the men. But does it matter? How exactly does one tell the story of the resurrection without being considered a fool? And that’s exactly what happened in response to the first ever Easter sermon.

The text tells us that the men considered the women’s testimony to be “an idle tale.” In Greek, that phrase is an earthy word known as λήροσ (LAY-ros) which means “idle talk,” “nonsense,” or “garbage.” Those are both rather tame translations of a word that really means something a bit more…shall we say, colorful. It would appear, therefore, that the women aren’t the only ones in this story who are “at a loss.” They call BS on the women’s testimony. All of them, that is, except Peter.

Peter responds to the women’s testimony not by “calling λήροσ,” as it were. Instead, Peter gets five rapid-fire verbs that propel him forward. He “gets up” and “runs,” arrives at the tomb to “stoop” and “look,” and then he “sees.” He sees the linen cloths by themselves. He then went home amazed.

And then that’s it. A frustrating aspect of Luke’s version of the story is that it gives us so very little information - none, in fact - as to Peter’s beliefs, motivations, or emotions. I mean, it does say that he was “amazed” but that, by itself, doesn’t say a whole lot. We don’t know why Peter ran to the tomb after hearing the women’s testimony. Was it because he believed them? Or was it because he doubted them? When he got to the tomb and found it empty, was he “amazed” because he believed in Jesus’ resurrection? Or was he simply “amazed” that the women were telling the truth after all?

It’s funny, isn’t it, how the resurrection almost always leaves us with more questions than answers! And, when on the journey of faith and we find far more questions than answers, we often turn to music to give us the ability to sing that which so blatantly defies comprehension or logic.

Our roadmap for this Lenten series has been the beloved hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” A week ago on Palm Sunday we sang, “Songs of Loudest Praise.” On Maundy Thursday, we experienced the “Streams of Mercy” as we washed one another’s hands and broke bread with our neighbors at Fellowship Presbyterian Church. On Friday, we gathered with those same neighbors here to recognize that, like Peter, we are “prone to leave the God we love.”

And today, we conclude the season of Lent with “…And I Hope” from the line, “And I hope by thy good pleasure safely too arrive at home.”

“…and I hope” is a phrase that begins with an ellipsis, those three little dots that tell us that there’s something that came before. And, in the case of this beloved hymn, what comes before “and I hope” is the phrase, “hither by thy help I’m come.”

Hither by *God’s* help, my friends, we’ve come so far. And the Good News of the Resurrection is that nothing, not even death itself, can disrupt God’s abiding presence in the ups and downs of our life of faith. That empty tomb that bewildered the disciples that day bewilders us to *this* day, because it just doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t make sense that God would raise Jesus from the dead, just as it doesn’t make sense that we keep telling this incredulous story to a weary world each and every year as the winter gives way to spring’s newness. It doesn’t make sense that God would chose us to be the vehicles of God’s grace in a world crying out for justice, for peace, for reconciliation. It just sometimes seems like a load of λήροσ!

“…and yet we hope by thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home.”

“…and we hope.”

You know, the very person who penned the words to “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” himself had times when he didn’t believe the very words he created. They were written by a young man by the name of Robert Robinson. Robinson grew up in England and lost his parents at a young age. With no social safety nets available to him, he spent most of his youth running with various gangs on the streets of London.

One day, he and his friends harassed a fortune teller, forcing her to drink alcohol and predict their futures. The woman gave him a prediction that, for whatever reason, gave him a change of heart. Not long after this incident, he came across the famed Methodist preacher, George Whitfield, whose preaching compelled Robert Robinson to begin his life as a follower of Jesus. He penned the words to “Come Thou Fount” in 1757 to express his profound gratitude for the fact that Jesus “sought [him] as a stranger / wandering from the fold of God.”

Years later, Robinson fell into depression and experienced a significant crisis of faith. During this time, Robinson was on a train with a woman who struck up a conversation with him about her love of his hymn “Come Thou Fount,” unaware that she was speaking to the very person who wrote it. She shared with him how it had brought her much comfort and joy over the years of her faith. Though Robinson tried his best to change the subject, the woman was insistent on sharing her faith with him.

Legend has it that he turned to the woman in exasperation and said, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then.” The woman looked at him gently, and said, “Sir, the ‘streams of mercy’ are still flowing.”

Friends, whether you’re having an “…and I hope” moment, or a λήροσ moment, the streams of mercy are still flowing.

Whether you came here because the alleluias are flowing freely or whether they are stuck in your throat because grief still lingers, the streams of mercy are still flowing.

When death seems to have the final word, and we’re tempted to give into cynicism, fear, violence-worship, or despair, the streams of mercy are still flowing.

In a world where the immigrant, the refugee, the marginalized and oppressed cry out for justice, the streams of mercy are still flowing and you and I, by the waters of our baptism, are called to be vehicles of those waters in word and in deed!

Friends, we don’t live an either/or faith. We live a both/and faith. There is suffering in the world *and* we hope. Creation cries out for healing *and* we get to work! Our political atmosphere turns neighbor against neighbor *and* we strive for reconciliation in Christ’s name. Death seems to have the last laugh *and* we sing Jesus Christ is Risen Today! We turn on the news and the λήροσ abounds, *and* we hope by God’s good pleasure safely to arrive at home! Like Peter, we’ll perhaps walk from that empty tomb shell-shocked and uncertain, curious as to what this means for our lives, the lives of our neighbors, and the life of this beautiful, broken world in which we live.

It doesn’t make sense to me. And if it doesn’t to you, either, then you’re in good company! But the good news of the Resurrection is that faith doesn't require us to “understand” it. Faith, instead, calls us to respond to it with our voices, our hands, our feet, our very lives. And so, we’ll begin in response by singing our next hymn whose second verse sings:

*The Lord of life is risen today!*

*Death’s mighty stone is rolled away.*

*Let all the earth rejoice and say:*

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*