

FINDING LIFE - THE LIGHT OF DAY EASTER

Luke 24:1-12

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz
University Congregational United Church of Christ
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Scripture:

Luke 24:1-12¹

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 is 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 all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and two other women with them who told us 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.

Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz

Please join me in prayer.

Word always beyond all of our words,

May Your Word be spoken,

May Your Word be heard,

May You turn us to life again. -- Amen

Well, every Easter you know the story is exactly the same.

It is exactly the same.

The women come to the tomb

with spices to anoint Jesus's body.

They find instead that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb

and Jesus' body is gone!

And every year they always hear that same surprising, incomprehensible word

that he is not here, Christ is Risen.

Every year the story is exactly the same, and the *only* thing that changes every Easter is us. Is us. We change every year. As we come again, we hear the same story and the same thing. And this year as

¹ Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

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every year, the story asks us -- asks you and asks me -- this: What is standing in the way of your life? What's standing in the way of your life *this* year?

Well, I don't know about you, but what stands in the way of my life all too often is things not being as I thought they should be. Things not being as I *planned* them to be, as I would *like* them to be, and because of that, I fuss and I flutter and I feel lots of things. And I don't like it! Things are not like I planned them to be.

And I play this game with myself "*If only* this were different → *then* I would be happy".

Do any of you play this game? Do any of you have any "if onlies"?

[*Laughter*]

If onlies ... Do any of you have an "if only"?

Give me an "if only," Helen.

[*Silence.*]

What's your "if only." If only this

Anybody have an "if only?"

What's an "if only"? [*Male voice: If only Trump weren't running.*]

Oh, my gosh!

"If only" what else"? Oh, my goodness! Then life would be good!

What's standing in the way of our life ... If only what?

[*Elaine: If only I had more time.*]

If only I had more time, life would be good! ...

If only what?

If only what? ...

"If I only had more money. Oh, my goodness. Life would be good."

My favorite one often in my life is,

"If only I had different parents. Then, oh, my gosh, my life would be so great."

"If only I didn't have to go to church this morning, oh my gosh, my life would be so good."

"If only I didn't have to go to school tomorrow. Ah! Life would be so good."

If only, if only, if onlies trap us and keep us stuck, don't they?

Well, they sit on my life and, yes, probably they sit on yours.

Well, in the story the women come to the tomb, and life is not as they wanted it to be, as they expected it to be.

They had spices.

They had got up early.

They had done their thing.

No body!

How do they feel?

Well, in the story, we hear that they are perplexed. They puzzle. We hear that Peter came -- a little late to the scene, but he came to the scene, and he was amazed, *amazed* that things were like that.

Well, what are some of the other feelings that might come up when things are not like you would like them to be?

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What's another feeling that might come up?

- [*Frustrated.*] -- Frustrated!
- [*Fear.*] -- Fear. Oh, my gosh. Good!
- [*Anger.*] -- Anger? Anger! Anger ...

Oh, my goodness, anger: Who has been hearing a lot of anger, anger recently? Oh, my goodness!

Well, you know it is the anger amidst all those other feelings that is kind of drowning out Easter this year. Oh, my gosh, now anger does not show up in the story, in our story this year, but it's *off* stage. It is off-stage. Because can you imagine that poor servant that had to come and knock on poor Pilate's [door] that morning and say, "I'm sorry, sir. I'm sorry. But you thought you were done with that Jesus! You're not done yet. He's gone! The body is gone." Can you imagine the ruckus in the palace?! Can you imagine that anger?! Oh, my gosh! So, lots and lots of anger off-scene in our story.

Now, how many of you can find something in you that you are angry about today? Can anybody find anything you're angry about today? ... How about anything that you've heard others are angry about? ... Can you find anything you're angry about? ... Anything you're angry about? ...

All right. Find something you are angry about. ... And I want you to do this: put a word to it. Put a word to it or a phrase to it. What are you angry about or what have you heard people are angry about? And *together* we are going to say it together on three. ... Ready? ... We are going to make a little noise. Ready ..

One ... Two ... Three ... What are you angry about? [*Cacophony*]

Yes! Good! Let's do that again.

One .. Two .. Three .. [*Cacophony*]

Oh, and one last time. A little louder.

One! Two! Three! [*Cacophony*]

Oh, my goodness. That's good! That's good! We're angry about so many different things, and sometimes we're angry about some of the same things, but we're angry.

We're angry.

We're angry.

We're angry.

Interestingly, who is the *angriest* among us?

Well, I was kind of struck to find out that it is people that look like me! People that look like me are actually the angriest. We're white, we're men, and we're middle-aged. Good heavens. ... But it is not hard ... Uh ... It *is hard* being us. [*laughter*] And I'll tell you why it's hard, I think, being us, because we had the most invested in the story: that *if only* we did these things and *if only* we worked hard we'd have a job; and *if only* we did this we were guaranteed happiness; and *if only* we did this our children would be safe. And you know what? Our *if onlies* didn't work out so well. And here we are right in the heart of middle-age and it's not like we were told it should be. And so we're angry.

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Now, sometimes anger is a very good emotion, isn't it? oah! It's so good to feel angry sometimes, because anger reminds us *we are alive!* Life is not done with us. We are alive! And anger can do things. It can do powerfully wonderful things. But we're also seeing in this world today that while anger can be a force of life, it can *so* as well be a force of death. And that's what we're seeing, aren't it? We're seeing, as we turn against each other and say *if only ...*, *if only* about those Muslims, *if only* those Mexicans, *if only* those bankers, *if only* those bureaucrats, *if only ... you ...*, *if only ...* it were different. And we end up pushing each other away. And anger cycles and gets louder ... and louder ... and louder ... and louder.

And in the midst of it, all we are given is a tiny little word today that says, "Christ is risen. Christ is risen." In the midst of it all, all we are given is Easter.

Now, you know sometimes Easter comes in with a fanfare, and we bring the blast out. Oh, my goodness, and it's loud and we sing, "Thine is the glory!" But you know, this year maybe there is so much noise that we need an Easter that comes quietly, and like a whisper, and like a light of dawn over the hill, and whispers to us all in the midst of *all* that is not as we would want it to be, "Christ is risen. Christ risen." But what the heck does that mean? Huh? What the heck does that mean? And if you feel like that, you got it! You got it. What does that mean? We're always thrown back on that: what *does* that mean?

It is such a perplexing story. You know, all of the evidence is so contradictory. Some people say that whoever this risen Christ is, boy, it's like a ghost because he can like walk through walls. And others say, no, you can actually touch his hands. Others say, you *can recognize* the Risen Christ when he walks into the room. And other people say that, no, in fact you *can't*; you can't recognize the Risen Christ. And some of those contradictions make us believe -- make some of us believe -- that it just shows the story is not true and the story never happened. But for others of us, it says, oh, that's all the more evidence that the story did, because whatever happened was all beyond *all* words, was beyond all words, was beyond *all* of our knowing, *all* of our understanding. It was something new and it was a different answer to the question, "What's in the way of *my* life?" And a new opening is possible.

You know several years ago, my life was *full* of things not turning out like I wanted them to. It was full of losing and loss. And I felt very lost in the midst of it. And I realized in the midst of that time that I actually really didn't believe in Resurrection. I mean I had preached about it. And I had counseled others that it is true there is life on the other side of death. I helped people point to it and point to hope. But suddenly it came down to my own life, and I didn't believe that there was anything else on the other side of loss and letting go. And so I did and I struggled over all of my *if onlies* I had done this differently *if only* this were different *if only, if only, if only, if only*.

And in the midst of that time I heard a whisper. I heard something that I'd never heard before. "Peter. You gotta go learn how to sail." What! Gotta go learn how to sail? That makes no sense! I don't like boats! I don't like wind! I hate tippy things! I don't like being out in the water.

"Peter, You gotta learn how to sail."

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And the only thing, the only thing a right I did at that time was I listened to that voice. And I went down to the Center of Wooden boats and I, I began to learn how to sail and I learned to listen for something different, that I had never listened to before. And I went to learned to listen for the wind: that wind that surrounds us all the time and speaks in a language that is not our own. I learned how to listen to the winds.

You know, the women when they got the news that Christ is Risen they came back to the disciples and the disciples, they all shook their heads and said "You're crazy." – "It's an idle tale," is a nice way of putting it. They didn't believe them.

But, you know, when I learned to sail and I learned to listen to the wind, I learned to listen for the people in my life that had listened to those women and said to me, "You know what, Peter, perhaps there is another way. ... Perhaps there is another way. ... Perhaps there is life before you." Really? Really?

And I began to listen to those voices. I began to listen to something stirring deep inside my heart that would sometimes often come as a surprise. "Peter, you need to do this new thing." "You need to enter this new place." Wow! ... Wow! ... Really? ... Really? ... Really.

And I learned to listen to Jesus in a way that I had never ever listened to Jesus before, a Jesus who I felt looked me right in the eye, no ... I *knew* a Jesus who looked me in the eye and looks you *in the eye* today and says this, "No matter what you have done, no matter what you have seen, you are forgiven. You *are* forgiven. You are open to a new story beyond your what-ifs and if-onlies, a story of life that is not done with you yet. Jesus said he will always say, "I came that you..., that you..., that you..., that you, that me, that all of us might have life and might have it abundantly." .. hoh... Really. Then *why* have we said that we are done with life? In the midst of it all hear the whisper "Christ is risen." ... Huh... Huh... I wonder what that means? Perhaps, perhaps there is another way.

Happy Easter.

Amen.

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