

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.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. (231)

Resurrection is unlike anything else. It defies similes, as there is nothing it is like. It defies metaphors as there is nothing like *it*. It runs beyond evocation because we've never experienced anything like it, such as we might recall it or have it evoked for us. It defies logic. It defies the laws of nature as far we know them.

The best way to understand to—or, better, to apprehend it: the best way to apprehend what resurrection is, is to go with desire. Resurrection is the fulfilment of deepest desire.

Deepest.

It's why Luke begins his resurrection narrative at not just dawn, but at early dawn. The word in the original Greek is *bathos*, which is in every translation I could find rendered "early dawn," though the word itself means "deep," as in "deepest dawn." It's a time of day to evoke that original morning. (I'm sure of it; Luke was a careful writer, a literary writer.) We are now, with the women at the tomb, as in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep—that darkened deep.

This—this moment, with the women at the tomb—is a moment of pre-creation.

This—this moment of deepest dawn at the tomb—is a moment of re-creation, a starting again, as with Noah and his ark, a starting again, but without all the attendant destruction.

When the kids were younger and we had a toy set, an ark and pairs of animals, I was always mystified as to why this had come down as a children's story—this of all stories! Noah and his ark, but then all that destroyed mess. So much destruction imagined in that story! So much death. A drowning of all that had been, except for Noah and those lucky enough to be aboard, because all that had been had turned out to be a big mess. People doing evil things. Animals devouring one

another. Lions attacking oxen. Wolves devouring lambs. Nature and culture both: so reliant on death.

The story is supposed to be a promise, that there will be a renewal, a renewed creation. But it's dreadful, too. And yet we make toys of it. And yet we tell children.

This, though, this one, this morning at the point of deepest dawn. Something new. God is doing something new, a reforming, a rising.

But it's not a rising on the graves of the old creation. It's a rising from but one grave...

...which is empty.

It's impossible, I know.

It's impossible, I know.

But just imagine it. Just imagine it—neither to hurt nor destroy.

This was the biblical theme of one whole summer of summer camp for me. During my college summers, I was a staff member at the UCC Outdoor Ministry site, Horton Center in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Pine Mountain, a little thing overlooking the mighty and fickle Mount Washington, a mountain with three peaks, perfect for a Christian camp. The theme one summer was All My Holy Mountain. So, I had a lot of time to imagine it. I've had a head start.

I'll give you a minute to catch up.

Imagine it. Neither to hurt nor to destroy, neither to be attacked by natural predators nor civilizational ones, and neither to be the one attacking, the predator. A sustaining peace. Not just a cease-fire, not just an armistice, a shalom.

So, here's the thing: if *you* can imagine it—you who are simple, you who are subjective and caught up in your own experience and limited by your own perspective, you as someone who tires easily and gets distracted by all that you have to do—then how much more so might God be able to imagine such a thing, and then manage to do such a thing—God who is the mind of all; God who is the beating heart of all life, and the pulse of everything sustained, and the current of everything redeemed, the alpha and the omega, the origin and the end; the one whom we remember and in whom we hope; the one who imagined and spoke that it might be so. How much more so can this God do, which we can imagine, but imagine.

Why draw the line of impossible here? I mean, consider what has already been done. Air, water, land, trees. Light, stars, mountains, rocks. Animals—sloths and cheetahs, monkeys and snails, dogs and donkeys and dogs that bark at the donkey who lives next door. The human mind. The human *being*. If all this (so wondrous!) is what God has already done, is it so outlandish to

consider this one final thing: life that sustains life? Life that rises not on the graves of the departed, or the mass graves of those slaughtered, but that rises of its own power and grace?

Why draw the line just short of that?

Why draw the line on what God can do just short of the thing that we most desire, we've (it seems) always most desired, for old are the images and stories that voice such desire—that life might not depend upon death, that life might not rely on death neither as a practical matter nor as a governing strategy nor in any other way—as if this isn't also what God most desires? A holy mountain on which none shall hurt or destroy, a grand feast, with table already set, where the food is such that nothing had to give its life so others might eat, truly nothing had to give its life *but Christ*—he who gave his life only to be given it back? Isn't this what has long been imagined as God's aim and continued laboring forth? Isn't this the ancient promise and future realization which we're ever to remember, remember?

Luke alone would have the people remember.

The resurrection narratives: all four gospels tell it in their own way, emphasize different aspects, and even contradict one another. All four versions—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—have their consistencies and their contradictions and their emphases. One consistency: the tomb was empty. One thing insistent: death had not taken its hold. Luke alone, though, has the women at the tomb told to remember: “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.” And with that they remembered: “Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.”

And we think of this as some slight thing, some common thing. To remember: we think of it as commonplace. Something slipped your mind, but then you remember it, if you're lucky.

But to remember in the sense Luke means it is more active than that, and more engaging. It comes to us in the Greek middle voice, which is between the active voice and the passive voice. The middle voice has it that the one who is active is also acted upon.

Incidentally, this middle voice features in ancient Greek and doesn't at all in Modern English, which is to say the middle voice features in the Biblical telling of Jesus and the early church, though is lost in translation to what most of us can read.

For what it's worth, I think this, which is lost in translation, is essential to the life of faith. Modern English would have us as fully active or fully passive, either the principal actor in life or one to whom life largely happens. Modern English, I think, is an intensely secular language. There

is no third party who transcends. There's no grander scale of things happening than the human subject doing its verbing to an environment that is otherwise dormant. The middle voice suggests another principal actor, a higher one. The middle voice has it so when we act, we are also acted upon.

Luke has the women remember in the middle voice—which is to say when these women remembered, they were active in that remembering, but they were also acted upon in that remembering. They were affected.

They were changed.

I always struggle in preparing to preach on Easter. The resurrection is impossible to preach on because it's unlike anything else. It defies simile, it defies metaphor, it resists the objective correlative, my favorite writing mode, when you lay two separate things next to one another and invite your audience to see how they correlate. But resurrection has no correlates. It is radically what it is, and nothing else. It is our desire, our deepest desire, radically addressed, the problem addressed at its root. Resurrection is our deepest desire radically made real.

And it's impossible.

And we come here as we do, however frequently or infrequently, to remember, to be affected and changed in our remembering that deep desire, that desperate hope, that ancient promise so we might better live.

Maybe you're new here. Maybe you're long here. So maybe this is news, or maybe this is a reminder: our project as church is to cultivate this remembering, to cultivate this way of thinking, this mind set, this mindfulness—that what seems fixed about this world is actually flux; that what seems intractable and unforgiving as “just the way things are,” is actually a creation in birth pangs laboring forth a fuller being of itself; that those who deal in death and who seem to dominate, terrible as they are, destructive as they can be in their reign, are not victorious; that those who live by lies, which are assertions of power over the real, will come to the limits of that power past which God's reality will sustain. We come here to have cultivated (the middle voice!) a way of mind and heart that is resurrection, a living past the horizons of our more human knowing into God's reign of life and love, grace and peace.

If this is the frame of mind you want for your living, a frame that encompasses all things, those established and those impossible and those impossible but for God, then this is where you can come, you are welcome here to remember your way back into hope.

Happy Easter, everyone, and thanks be to God.