

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 4, 2010
Easter Day
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:14-17, 22-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Luke 24:1-10

I want to focus our attention this morning on the experience of the women in the Gospel reading, because I think that what they experienced can also be typical of us at various points of our faith journey.

Luke tells us that the women come very early in the morning to the tomb with the spices they had prepared in order to anoint Jesus' body for burial. They arrive and find the stone has been rolled away. They go in, and Jesus' body is not there.

While they're wondering what is going on, they encounter the two men in gleaming clothes. The men question them, saying, "why do you look for the living among the dead?"

It's a fair question, and behind it there is a hint of a reprimand, a slight scold.

You see, the Gospels record for *us* that Jesus tells his disciples *in advance* that he will be killed and rise again, and so the question on the lips of these two men is a fair question.

But to make it perfectly clear, the men continue. "He is not here; he has risen! *Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:* 'The

Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ “

And then Luke tells us: “Then they remembered his words” (v. 8)

How often is the experience of these dear women our experience, brothers and sisters?

How often in your life have you been taught something in a class or at work, and you don’t really “hear” or internalize that particular truth or lesson. And then at some point later on, something happens in your life, and at that moment you remember that truth or lesson which you had encountered earlier.

When Connie and I were teenagers, our pastor had a barrel full of clever sayings that he used to try to inspire and motivate us. Those of us in the teen group used to kid and make fun of Pastor Dickens about them.

One of his truisms that he often told us was: “failing to plan is planning to fail.”

That’s good advice, especially for teenagers preparing to graduate high school and enter college or the work force. But we weren’t quite at that point yet, and so we just “blew it off.”

A couple years later, I started my first semester of college. The assignments piled up, the responsibilities mushroomed, and I felt buried beneath the load.

I woke up one morning in my dorm room, and these words floated into my mind: “failing to plan is planning to fail.” And I said: “Aahh, that’s what Pastor Dickens meant!”

I think this is what may have happened to the women at the tomb. I don’t think they had *completely* forgotten that Jesus had told them he would be killed and would rise again. But when Luke tells us, “then they remembered his words,” I think that he is saying that sometimes our faith works “in reverse,” that is, it moves from fulfillment to promise rather than from promise to fulfillment.

Often, it is only after the fulfillment of a promise comes that we get the “aha” moment, and the truth becomes real in our lives. It is after that fulfillment that we then can say, “Aahh, so that’s what Jesus meant.”

If this is true, then New Testament scholar Fred Craddock has some good advice for us:

For this reason alone it is most important that the preacher share with the listeners the story of Jesus and of the Church. Such recitals may not strike fire at the time or be heard as matters of burning relevance; however, the time will come when the congregation will remember and it will make all the difference. But one cannot remember what one has not heard. [[Interpretation](#), Luke, p. 283.]

Craddock’s words reminded me this week of why Epworth Chapel on the Green exists, and why I wanted to come to be your pastor.

Why are we a church that immerses itself in the Christian calendar, that patterns its life and worship according to how God has acted in history in Jesus Christ to save us?

Why, in our worship each week, do we hear from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels? Why is there so much public reading of Scripture in our worship?

Why, through credal statements and prayers, do we repeat certain things a great deal in our worship?

Why do we have a service called the Easter Vigil?

Why do we take the symbolic and visual aspects of worship seriously?

We do so, because it is vital that we tell and hear the story constantly. For the story is so vast and so grand that we cannot internalize it in one sitting. And there are parts of the story which may not connect with us at present, but add in some life experience and the passing of time and you will wake up one day with a big “aha” flashing in your mind, and you will say, “So that’s what this is all about!”

As Craddock says, parts of the story may not light a fire under you now, but at some point it *will* catch fire, and you will remember, just as the women at the tomb remembered.

And of course, the heart of that story is the reality which we celebrate today. Jesus is not dead. He is alive. And because he lives, nothing is ever the same again.

As we come to the Table this morning, our hearts are full of great joy. For we share in Christ's victory over death and the grave. In the early Church, during the Easter season, persons often stood when they came forward to receive the Eucharist, symbolic of being raised up with Christ and sharing in his victory. Feel free to do that during this Easter season, but feel free to kneel also, depending upon your preference.

Either way, it is the risen Christ who awaits us here this morning at his Table. Thanks be to God, that the power that raised Jesus from death also raises us to new life, and grants us a share in the Kingdom.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.