

Wholehearted and Rising
Easter, 2022

Luke 24: 1-12

24 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.^[a] ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women^[b] were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men^[c] said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.^[d] 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.^[e]

They’d been all in, everything they had, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary “the mother of James”, women of Galilee, who Luke told us earlier, provided for Jesus’ ministry “out of their own resources.” Surely, they’d been changed by being with him like all the disciples and those listened to him as Ezekiel describes:

A new heart I will give you, says the Lord. And a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. A vulnerable heart, an aware and attentive heart.

Now those women of aware and attentive heart did not turn away, but looked into Jesus face of suffering. Witnessing his crucifixion and his body being laid in the tomb. Then went home and prepared spices and linens to anoint and wrap this precious, lifeless form, so that he might be buried once the sabbath was over. Then women rose early the first day of the week and made their way to the tomb.

A Hasidic rabbi once said: *There is nothing so whole as a broken heart, for it is open to suffering, just as the Lord's own.*

These wholehearted, broken-hearted women walked to the tomb not sure how they would roll the stone away but proceeding nonetheless for they would do what must be done. Only find the stone rolled away. The heart of stone was rolled away and two beings, dressed in light, asked them:

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why are you here in the tombs, when the Lord is the Lord of life? Don't you remember? Remember that he told you all this would come to pass? That death would come, but that would not be the end of it?

And the women remembered what Jesus taught them what he'd shown them. What they were never to dwell in death, nor vengeance, nor hate his healings, his stories, his teaching all were of the unstoppable power of God. Luke says that the women returned home to tell the other disciples about what they had seen. The men didn't believe them. Who could? But no matter, no matter that Peter had to run to the tomb to see for himself the linen cloths. For they had faced the unfathomable and then been told the impossible, the broken hearts were whole. For they knew, KNEW, that that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Indeed, who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or homelessness, or pandemic, or inflation, or the peril of bombs in the night? No, says, Paul, no say the brokenhearted, wholehearted women, no say the pastors in Ukraine, no say the believers who have risen up in Russia.

For if God is for us, then who is against us? For we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God made known in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And knowing that, the women's hearts, the disciples' hearts, Paul's, and we are free, free to live in the heartland where Jesus lived. Even with all its risks, and vulnerabilities. And uncertainties. We live in this heartland. This home of God, planted in in our hearts. As have those who have followed Jesus before us. In the 3rd century, believers forged a list of the unfathomable, impossible. Truths of the faith, the story of the Christ, so that those who had not seen. Might believe and we have joined in this apostle's creed ever since. Words that we might not have written ourselves. We might take out one or two lines. But it binds us, to those faithful women at the tomb, the other disciples, to Peter, to Paul, to believers hiding in Rome, and living in China, in El Salvador, in Poland. We may not believe every word.

Rachel Held Evans says "There are parts we might leave out, or did, but we do say, *"I want to believe"*.

I want to believe in there is a good and gracious God who created all the beauty we can see as well as all we can't and who redeems all things.

I want to believe there was once a man, who, like all other men, went to the grave, but unlike all other men, triumphed over it and ascended to a place we don't yet know but will someday.

I want to believe that there is one church, one holy catholic church bound together across time and space. In marvelous mystery and faithful companionship. By a spirit who knits together what we only know how to tear apart.

I want to believe in a love so lavish it overwhelms us. I want to believe in a faith that can handle all my questions. I want to believe in a religious that not only tolerates but embraces my whole heart".

I want to believe the women who went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away. To find my identity, my homeland, in the same God, the same Jesus. The same gospel of this community of believers. And living there, in the heartland, can make us brave. What if we, here in this place, pledge to live there, wholeheartedly.

The church is changing, and if some of the ways we are used to are dying then so be it, for we trust that others are rising. Quite a few young folks I'd never met came to services this week.

One walked up to me after Good Friday service, smiling. What is your name I asked? *Angel* she said, smiling, *Of course it is*, I said. And so, with the angels among us, we are rising. Rising from our grief, rising from consuming worry, and self-destruction. Rising to be a place of freedom. Rising to be a people of hope amidst war and pandemic. Rising to be a selfless people. Rising to be gracious in a time of discourtesy, to be merciful, in a time without mercy. Rising to sacrifice rather than covet and hoard. Rising to be the wholehearted people.

Jesus invites us to be. To live with him, even now, wholehearted and rising. Rising, rising, rising from the dead. Amen.