

Acts 10:34-43(TMB) ~ Luke 24:1-12  
*An Idle Tale?*  
 Easter/Resurrection of the Lord ~ April 21, 2019  
 Communion Meditation  
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**Introduction to Acts 10:34-43**

How wide *is* God's love? God is for *us*, certainly. But what about them? You know—the *other* people. The ones who aren't here. The ones who are different from us. "Those people." Just where *does* God draw the line? In our first scripture reading, we will hear the Apostle Peter trying to explain to his audience—folks expecting the line to exclude the Gentiles—just how much wider the door of God's love really is. This was a stretch for Peter, too. How could everyone be invited to God's party? That was an astounding, perplexing concept over 2,000 years ago and it still is for us today.

Let us each picture the person or people we would exclude, as we listen now for the voice of God within these words of scripture written in the book of Acts, chapter 10, verses 34-43. I will be reading from *The Message Bible*.

**Introduction to Luke 24:1-12**

To help us get a running start and set the scene in our mind's eye, we need to back up four verses to what happened to Jesus' body after he died on the cross. Luke tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, had gone to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. In 23:53 it is written: "Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath day they rested according to the commandment."

This is right where today's gospel text picks up the story in Luke 24 verse 1. Picture the sheer silence and deep darkness shrouding the rock-hewn tomb. The Jewish Sabbath ends at sunrise Sunday morning, so the women are ready--I imagine them setting out their spices, placing them in a satchel before they went to bed the night before, eager to get to Jesus' tomb at the first allowable moment, the first light of the new day. But they are not ready (how could they be?) for what they are about to discover. Let us listen now for the One whose thoughts are not our thoughts; whose ways are not our ways.

**Sermon:**

A six year-old came home from his first time to visit a church and his skeptical parents asked him how it was. "It was just great! This Jesus was a space traveler and he got evaporated because he was the good guy, and his friends were all confused and stuff, but he came flying back from another galaxy, and..." His mom and dad interrupted and said, "Ryan are you sure that's what the preacher said?" "Well... not exactly, but if I told you the stuff she *really* said, you would *never* believe it!"

We preachers have been known to tell some good ones. But certainly, this Easter story tops them all. And believe it or not, this one has been in circulation long before the days of the Twilight Zone (the original TV series), the X-Files, or Star Trek. In fact, the Easter story has been around for so long and it seems so familiar, it may take a six-year old's eyes and ears to sense its mystery and magic. Once we've

heard it 10 or 20 or 50 or 70 times—we know how the story goes. Oh yeah, Easter. Easter is when God raised Jesus from the dead to save us from our sins...I know about that, but what's for brunch?

The Easter story is easy to tell. But hard to believe. And it is even harder to claim the full power of Easter in our lives. The truth may be out there – but is it in here? How does it get in here, and stay here? How can the Easter story become THE STORY that saves and heals our broken hearts and this broken world? If you are looking at these beautiful flowers, hearing this heavenly music, but not really feeling it, I have good news for you. Neither did the two Mary's, Joanna, the other women or Peter that day they found the tomb empty. Perplexed, yes. Terrified, yes. Confused, you bet. The Gospels tells us they were all that and more on that day of days. They didn't know it was Easter.

But here we are, today—gathered in churches all over the world over 2,000 years later to celebrate. Do we know it's Easter? What seemed to them at first an "Idle Tale" went viral in a first century kind of way. It took longer than it would today with our Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook always in the palm of our hands—like even right now! And if you are sitting in the pew right now listening with one ear, and tweeting, Facebooking, or posting on Instagram with the other – I will raise you up as an example. Yes, an example of how what seemed an "Idle Tale" turned into something real that people could taste and see. The empty tomb, the stunning discovery of the Risen Christ only became real in community. The Good News of salvation became real as people shared the news, lived the news that Love wins—that God's love will not be bound. Or killed, or shamed or dismissed.

Do we know it's Easter? Are we Easter people? I have good news for you on this, too. Being Easter people may be different than you think. Being Easter people is *not* about getting everything completely right. Being Easter people, or Christ-followers does not mean looking good and pretending we have our act together: shoes shined, closets cleaned, email in-box empty, credit cards payed off, taxes done, tires rotated, ideal weight attained—No. Being Easter people is about letting God take your hand wherever you are, and raise you up as you are, into the Healing Light of our Risen Lord.

Being Easter people is about being a person who says, "I don't really get it, but I'm not going to give up because of the Risen Christ I know that even when I'm hurting inside; even when I have been lied to or dismissed, even when I act like a jerk and do stupid things and wish I could just disappear—God does not give up on me. God will not vote you off the island. God will never say, "you are the weakest link." God will never say, "You're fired!" God will never deport you from God's realm. We know this, we believe this because of Easter. Because Christ took our worst on the cross, and said "Yes, I still love you. "You are still my Beloved Child. I will never leave or abandon you. There is nothing you can do or have done to you that will change this truth."

Why would God do this? We don't know. But we do know this God, our God of all creation, rolled away the stone, and raised Jesus from the dead. By this act, we too have been given the power to get up again. No matter how far we have fallen or how many times. As individuals and as a community or nation. Let's start here with us in this sanctuary, today. If we are Easter people, we are resurrection people. And even if you're not sure how to spell resurrection—I want you to leave here today remembering one thing: what resurrection literally means. As you know, our Bible was not written in English (the King's English or anyone else's). The Gospel of Luke was originally written in Greek. And not the fancy Greek of Plato and Aristotle, but the "street Greek" of fishermen, like Peter and Andrew, James and John. The Greek word for resurrection is a very common word "anastasis" which literally means "again standing up." Picture Simon Peter's mom calling out to sleepy Simon, "Time to rise and shine! Time to anastasis!.... That common and every day word, for the most uncommon, extraordinary, out of this galaxy event.

Think about that the next time you wake up. God created us to be resurrection people every day—to again stand up—whether you are awakened by your cell phone ring tone, by the smell of coffee you set up the night before, by your dog nuzzling your face, or cat your jumping on your pillow—we wake up and we are “again standing up.” Yay!

But then sooner or later we fall. We all do. We fall flat on our faces, we bump our noses and skin our knees. We get mad at our friends on the playground, or on the internet and we hurl the ultimate 8-year old threat: “You can’t come to my birthday party!” And as we grow up our scraped knees turn into broken hips, our broken relationships cause deeper pain: divorce, abuse, neglect, denial. We fall. We fall hard. We break and we get broken. We use food, drugs, work, money, toys to numb the fall and run from God. The narcotic of sin and denial is powerful. But the power of God to raise us up again, to take our hand and help us “again stand up” is stronger.

Do you believe this? Do you know that it’s Easter? If you are wishing you did, but honestly are more perplexed than pumped, more skeptical than skipping for joy by this story, then you are right where the three women and Peter were that day. They were not ready for this. Perhaps you are not, either. But, here’s the good news: You are right in the resurrection zone because resurrection is about becoming someone we cannot yet imagine. Resurrection is about doing what we can to become a better world, one we cannot imagine yet. One that becomes less polarized. One where Democrats and Republicans can listen to one another, respect each other, and build bridges. To repent, to let God raise you up is to “to go beyond the mind you have.” That is the invitation here today to each of us and all of us. This possibility is thrilling and also threatening, isn’t it?

When you were asked before our first reading what person or people might you choose to exclude if God had not raised Jesus from the dead, who was that? Who were they? Do they know it’s Easter? Maybe you were put on this earth to put out your hand to them, to help them “again stand up.” Bring this person or people in your heart as you come to the Table. Otherwise, it might as well be” an idle tale.” Yes, God did send Christ to this galaxy. And Christ is risen and waiting here, at this Table. Christ is calling us to “again stand up” and come to this Table.