

“Resurrection”

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
April 17, 2022 – Easter Sunday
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

“I have seen the Lord!” Theologian Karoline Lewis says that *that* is the sermon itself for an Easter Sunday. John's Gospel begins before dawn – it was still dark. There is uncertainty among the women, I will audaciously suggest that these women too are disciples, and the first evangelists.

They walk to the tomb in the dark, and are startled to find it empty. It is Mary of Magdala, the woman in Jesus's orbit, whom theologians and storytellers love to wonder about. In her confusion and disorientation, finding the body missing, she encounters that man outside, mistakes him for a gardener. Well, you know the story.

Mary.

Rabbouni!

Recognition. Resurrection.

But what does that mean, Resurrection? Of course, there is the debate between traditional theology, that Jesus was physically, literally raised. More modern progressive theology suggests that we are not to take it literally, ancient believers had no concept of what was up in the sky, so they assumed it was heaven up there. This is I-don't-know-how-many(th) time preaching on the wondrous Easter story, and, I'm wondering: What is at the heart of Easter resurrection? Those words of Karoline Lewis:

Little more needs to be preached but Mary's testimony: I have seen the Lord.¹

Do you believe?

You see, that is the fundamental motivation behind John sharing these Gospel stories, that seeing, you and I might believe.

When I was a child, my imagination was, it seems now to me, it was limitless. I believed in so much, that I now might call fairy tales. It was that sense of wonder, on Christmas Eve as I fell asleep. On Easter Eve, I will admit that, attending Easter worship the next morning was not the great inspiration for my wonder as I went to sleep. I apologize for any inadvertent promotion I'm offering, here for the Easter chocolate empire that dominates our culture.

At the heart of Easter is the willingness, no the invitation to an absolute sense of surrender to awe and wonder.

After my Easter chocolate-induced coma subsided, every year I was witness to this same story that started in the dark, John's depiction of Easter morning that began in fear and grief, God's beloved, laid in a tomb. We can relate to those moments of fear or grief, waiting for the dawn to break.

But on that dark and depressing morning, came a startling declaration of Mary's, that “I have seen the Lord!”

¹ “I have seen the Lord!” Commentary by Karoline Lewis, March 20, 2016.
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/true-resurrection>

Ok, so I look to science to understand the universe. I have said that I look to the medical authorities, not to the politicians or theologians, for my direction about how to be safe in pandemic times and as I try show my love for my neighbours.

But for my understanding of God, of mystery as I seek hope in desperate circumstances, I yearn for perspective, knowing that I am not alone in my messy life. Then, a seeming miracle happens! I have certainly witnessed miracles – a positive health outcome that doctors couldn't explain, a broken relationship mended. Witnessing such a miracle, I look to rational explanations, and miss this opportunity for absolute wonder and gratitude. I could seek a logical answer – my option is often my internet browser, the new encyclopedia. Or, alternatively, in that moment I could stay with the wonder and mystery, as those first evangelists, Mary and the women did.

There has been a great deal of conversation and study, where we have discussed particularly the crucifixion of Jesus: Why did Jesus die? Was he supposed to die?

That cross over there (gesturing to the wooden cross transformed by white cloth), it loomed during Lent, as it haunted the followers of Jesus, and Jesus himself, I'm sure. That day on Golgotha, regardless of how we answer the why, Good Friday brought death to the Jesus movement. Or so they thought.

This morning, we keep that cross here; Jill has extravagantly draped it with white cloth and lilies. We keep the cross in this sanctuary to make clear that God had the last word. That cross is a reminder of the human violence that still prevails across our earth. But, as John shows us, God in Jesus calls us to transformation. Dawn brings hope that we all might be changed by the discovery that Jesus could not be held in a tomb. May our lives reflect that wonder as we love one another and renounce violence.

Resurrection began – like scenes in tv shows and movies – where the doctor charges up the defibrillator and yells “clear!” There is an anxious silence, waiting for signs of life, and, to the medical team's relief, the heart rate returns.

Resurrection is kind of like that – but spiritually. That wondrous moment, whatever really happened, perhaps that doesn't matter. Perhaps we need to reclaim our child-like wonder, enough, to believe that resurrection can happen when we least expect it. When we are so tired and feeling hopeless. The science tells us that we have a slim chance of recovery. Where do we look to find hope in that moment? Maybe the love of those around us? Those practices that help us to feed our spirits, like going into the bush, praying, playing with the grandchildren.

Sometimes, every so often, though, a miracle happens. No medical or scientific explanation needed. We feel gratitude and wonder. I have seen the Lord!