

Learning to run toward hope

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Bible scholar Karoline Lewis points out something truly astounding to my mind about our Easter story today. She says this:

While [Bible] translations will render [the disciples'] reaction as "an idle tale," "foolish talk," or "nonsense," the real meaning of the Greek word is "garbage." The women announce Jesus' promises fulfilled and the response—from the ones who were closest to Jesus— is, "yeah, well, that's a bunch of rubbish." There is so much truth and honesty in this reaction. After all, the good news frequently seems too good to be true.¹

It is true, isn't it? It's almost unbelievable, Jesus alive, even if Jesus told his friends that this would happen.

Another scholar offers some insight about this story, in an article written, reflecting on the trauma caused by the pandemic. He says:

...the promise of new life is never straightforward, is it? We don't always recognize liberation when it is announced to us or believe what we hear about good news. We have become accustomed to loss, have seen the sheer power and spite of empire strike down those we love and believe in. Sometimes the trauma and the struggle change us deep down in ways that make it seem impossible to go back to how things were.²

Now, friends, I'm thinking, this is Dave now, thinking that the wonder, the sheer mystery of the Resurrection, this story is astonishing. Isn't it? What if someone asked you today, is the Resurrection true? Do you believe it? What would you say to them?

Those women who found the empty tomb must have struggled to say anything coherent to the male disciples that ancient dawn. But Peter, in spite of having little or no proof, likely grieving still, he ran to the tomb in this story. He didn't need rational explanation; he just embraced the wonder of it all. Perhaps that is how we respond when asked what we think about Resurrection, about the story that Jesus was alive – wonder, amazement, truly saying, exclaiming, Christ is Risen, Indeed!

Last Thursday, Maundy Thursday, I was preparing for our worship here, and heard the music of a grand party unfolding in our 2nd floor activity hall. I looked down from our 3rd floor church office and saw that Réseau ACCESS Network was having a party with many of their clients. Was it an Easter party? No, I don't think so. But it was, in a way. Projected on a screen was "Celebrating Resilience." Those individuals, many whom I see ambling along the lane behind the church, bent over, huddled in meagre blankets that I'm sure do little to ward off the cold. Coping with chronic homelessness, many facing profound mental health issues and addictions. Having just this month, lost the

¹ Commentary by Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis on Luke 24:1-12, A Sermon Planning Guide for Lent-Easter. sanctifiedart.org

² "Life after resurrection: Salvation is not a place but a way of life," by Brian Bantam. *The Christian Century*. April 21, 2021 found at christiancentury.org/article/faith-matters/life-after-resurrection

Supervised Consumption Site because the provincial government would not fund it. More people will die of overdoses again – those party-goers in our Hall must have known that.

SACY³, the shelter helping youth and young adults, a critical partner of ours and so many on the streets, has also closed due to lack of resources. They knew that, yet, still, they party. Why? They celebrate that, somehow, inexplicably, they are alive. They are together. Réseau ACCESS Network gathering them together to celebrate life, in all its frailty, its uncertainty, its day-to-day struggle – yet here they are, leading with hope, not fear, even if for that evening, like Peter.

Who knows what tomorrow will bring? We have this morning, to just feel wonder, community. God's Good News of new life breaks into our pain, our grief, our skepticism, in profoundly surprising ways.

Can I get an Amen to that?

³ SACY stands for The Sudbury Action Centre for Youth, and has been a significant partner of St. Andrew's United Church in their work to support community health and social well-being for vulnerable individuals, primarily youth aged 16-24. For more information, visit <https://www.theactioncentre.ca/>.