

## **2025 04 20 – *The Promise of Easter***

**Scripture: Luke 24:1-12** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

All four gospels tell this first Easter story in their own way. One of the aspects of Luke's version that I really like is that the writer acknowledges that there were several women who went to tomb. Three are named, Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, but the others are also acknowledged. All of these women had followed Jesus from Galilee, they had been part of the procession as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, they had stood at a distance watching Jesus die on the cross, they had followed Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid, and now on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, they have arrived at the tomb, bringing spices so they could properly prepare Jesus' body for burial.

But the women can't find his body—the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty—so the women are “at a loss over what to think.” They are puzzled, perplexed, wondering what is going on.

It's hard to get your head around, isn't it? These days the bodies of our loved ones are usually put in the care of funeral homes. Can you imagine going to the funeral home to make plans for a memorial service or celebration of life and being told by the director, “Your loved one's body is gone. It has disappeared.” I know my feelings would quickly run the gamut of disbelief, horror, anger and no doubt end up at rage.”

But the women at the tomb don't have that much time to think because two strangers suddenly appear and the women's emotions quickly swing from wonder to terror. One of the dazzling figures says to them, "Jesus is not here; Christ is risen." He reminds the women that Jesus had told them he would die and on the third day rise again. And it was then that the women began to remember.

And so they take their spices and return to place where Jesus' disciples, the eleven, and all the others are staying. All the women share in the telling of the story, but even with all those eye-witnesses the men refuse to believe them. Their story seems like nonsense, just an idle tale! Peter has to go and see for himself. So, he runs to the tomb, and like the women, finds it empty. We are told that "he went away, full of amazement at what had occurred. "

And that is how Luke's Easter story ends. The followers of Jesus have been puzzled, terrified, reassured, disbelieved, and amazed. But what seems to be missing from this story are the hallelujahs, the joyful noises, and the new life that we associate with this special day of the year. How do we get from an empty tomb and a group of fearful, disbelieving, wondering disciples to "Hey Now! Singing Hallelujah!"?

Well, it doesn't happen overnight. New life is not something that just suddenly appears. If we think about all the different kinds of death or loss that can happen in our lives, we know that there has to be a time of letting go, a time of healing, before new life can have a chance to grow. This is true no matter what kind of loss we are talking about.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in a recent blog, writes about walking by a woods near her home after a strong gale-force wind has gone through. She says,

I took the path to the river and started counting corpses. The first few came into view at the top of a high ridge: huge flat saucers of red dirt held together by roots that had never seen the light of day until now.

Barbara went on to describe the deep sadness that she felt at the loss of these magnificent trees growing near her home. But even as she mourned, she saw glimpses of new life. She wrote,

On my walk back to the house, I winced at the fallen oaks, but I saw past them as well—to dead trees that were still standing, full of woodpecker holes, or were sinking into the ground with bright green coats of moss on them. There was one trunk that had lost all its bark a long time ago with a small cave in its side. When I leaned down to look inside, it was full of nutshells: a chipmunk clubhouse, maybe, or a meadow mouse larder. People who study trees call these “nurse logs,” since even when they’re dead, they’re not gone.

<https://barbarabrowntaylor.substack.com/p/life-after-death-in-the-woods>

Four years ago, when I was on sabbatical, I stayed at a retreat house in the foothills of the Rockies and it was there that I took the picture that is up on the screen in front of you. For those of you at home, it is a picture of a decaying tree stump. And from the bottom of the stump, coming up through the soft bits of

wood, is growing a small plant. It is, in fact, a perfect pink rose. Often the new life that comes from death is quite different than the life we knew before.

We are able to sing our happy Hallelujah's because we know that the empty tomb is not the end of this story. It is instead the promise of Easter. The gospels go on to tell us that the followers of Jesus had various experiences of the Risen Christ over the coming days and weeks. Through the power of the Holy Spirit they found the strength and the courage to continue their rabbi's ministry.

In the book of Acts and through Paul's letters we hear of the congregations that began to form around the Mediterranean. It is through these congregations that Jesus' work continued until eventually Christianity, a new religion, was formed. We can sing our Happy Hallelujah's because Jesus' ministry did not die and as the Risen Christ, his Spirit continues to live on in the hearts and minds of Christians here in Swift Current and all around the world.

The promise of Easter is the promise of new life. It is a promise that those women at the tomb were only beginning to understand. It is a promise that we are called to remember even when we are midst of death, even when the pain and grief are still fresh in our hearts and minds. This promise of new life is the reason that we can celebrate that first Easter every year no matter what is happening in our lives and in our world.

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen!