

Seeking Life

As I read Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus, two questions come to mind. The first, of course, is the one the women are asked when they go to the tomb and find it empty. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* The second, is related to the reactions of various people to the news that Jesus is alive. *Who is a credible witness?*

According to Luke, it is women who go to the tomb early in the morning.¹ These women had been accompanying Jesus and his male disciples for quite a while.² They traveled with Jesus on his journey from Galilee, around Samaria, down to Judea, where they traveled through Jericho and on to Jerusalem. They watched Jesus' trial and crucifixion.³ They witnessed his burial.⁴ And now, they are bringing spices they have prepared to anoint Jesus' body. They are expecting a dead body, not an empty tomb.

They are surprised, confused and then terrified when two men suddenly appear. These men seem to glow with light.⁵ These heavenly messengers inform the women that Jesus is alive. They remind the women of what Jesus had said and did while they were with him. Because of their experiences with Jesus, the women accept the truth coming from this vision of heavenly messengers.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women know that their talk of the stone rolled away from the tomb, and of the two men in bright clothing saying Jesus has risen from the dead, will sound like nonsense to anyone who wasn't there. Yet the women faithfully report what they have seen and heard to the eleven disciples and all the others. And, not surprisingly, the men don't believe their incredible story.

The closest followers of Jesus dismiss the women's story as an idle tale, fiction, a lie, drivel, nonsense. Worst case scenario, they dismiss the story because they don't think it's possible for women to be credible witnesses. Not even these women who have been traveling with them as they all accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Best case scenario, they dismiss what the women tell them because it's an incredible story. Resurrection turns the world upside-down. It should be hard to believe.

Luke tells us that Peter decides to go and see for himself. Maybe Peter does this so he can prove how delusional the women are. Perhaps he does this because he thinks they may be right, but he needs to see it for himself. When he enters the open tomb and sees the linen cloths, but no body, he is convinced that Jesus is alive. He won't find Jesus in the place of the dead.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus' friends were filled with fear and sadness when they discovered the empty tomb. They were looking for Jesus "among the dead" and needed to be reminded of all that he had taught them. We read the stories of Jesus, about his birth; about his life of teaching, healing, and loving; about his death, burial and resurrection. We know that Jesus is among us, the living; however, we don't always see Christ in those we encounter. Instead, we sometimes dismiss them and their idle stories. Sometimes we see them as adversaries.

¹ Some of what follows is adapted from <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/palmc>; April Yamasaki, "Who Are These Women to Say Such Things," <https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/sundays-coming/speak-out-luke-241-12>; "Worship Resources, Lent-Easter 2019," *Leader: Winter 2018-19*, MennoMedia, p. 50; and Jim Friedrich, "Preaching on Easter Sunday Isn't about Convincing People," <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/opinion/preaching-easter-sunday-isn-t-about-convincing-people>.

² Luke 8:1-3

³ Luke 23:49

⁴ Luke 23:55

⁵ Luke 24:4, *The Voice*

Why do you look for the living among the dead? Why do you seek for life among dead ends? We want to cling to what we know (death) instead of entering into what we do not know (resurrection). We tend to follow the status quo rather than to risk the unknown. We look to dead ideals and dead customs for new life instead of creatively venturing forth into the new thing God is doing.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? Where is Jesus now, for you? Where might God be asking you to notice new life? Jesus is alive, still showing up as a transforming presence in a world fraught with grief, confusion, and fear. Who are we now and what must we become, in the light of the risen Christ?

Who is a credible witness? The women, and the men too, remembered the words of Jesus. They proclaimed what they saw, heard, and remembered. The resurrection is made real in both the proclamation and the remembering of Jesus' life. Whose stories do you need to listen to? Who is sharing surprising, grace-filled experiences? When have you dismissed such stories as idle tales?

Who is a credible witness? Life-giving news comes from unexpected people in unexpected ways. The women spoke up, even when they weren't believed. In what ways have you spoken up when you have witnessed resurrection, when you have seen and experienced the incredible, impossible love and grace of God?

Who is a credible witness? It's not a matter of proving the details of the resurrection. Even the four gospel writers don't agree on the details of this incredible story. Matters of faith are never finally proven. Faith is not generated by an irrefutable argument. Faith is communicated by witness. Rowan Williams describes it this way: *the believer's life is a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus. He or she demonstrates that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement. The believer shows Jesus as the center of his or her life.* How are you being called to share in this movement of Christ's self-giving love?

Our belief in and celebration of the risen Christ requires us to witness that we too "have seen the Lord." It requires us to seek and recognize the light of Christ in others.

Christ is risen! Christ is alive and goes before us to show and share what love can do. I encourage and challenge you to seek and share the life we celebrate this Easter morning.

Thanks be to God! Amen.