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Luke 24:1-12  
Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:1-2,14-24  
1 Cor. 15:19-26

April 21, 2019  
Resurrection of Our Lord

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Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!

But, you may ask, what does that really mean? Well...I can't tell you. I can't tell you what it means because today is not a day to be explained. Today is a day to be experienced.

There is a sign outside of Jerusalem's Church of All Nations, at the Garden of Gethsemane, that reads, "No explanations inside the church." The purpose of the sign is to encourage silence and reverence as you enter – not constant chatter about the things inside. But the principle is more profound. Because Easter Sunday, the resurrection, the empty tomb aren't things we can explain...they are things we experience.

That means...there is no one perfect explanation about the meaning of this day. Because each of us will tell a different story as to how we experience the risen Christ. Some of us will rejoice. Others will doubt. While others will simply not understand what all of the fuss is about. After all, it's kind of a crazy story, an unbelievable story. A story that's hard to make sense of and understand...at least at first glance. And if all you go on is the explanations, the text book answers, you may be forever wrestling with why you should care. I get it.

As much as I am a big fan of faith and as much as I wish everyone loved it as much as I do, I also realize that we come to this story in different ways and in different times. So if you are struggling with the risen Christ, you are not alone. And your struggle is important.

I love the fact that even the women who found the stone rolled back on that fateful day were themselves confused and terrified. They even got to see the empty tomb first hand and yet it took the miraculous appearance of two beaming angels to help them understand. The same was true for the disciples. When they were first told, the words seemed like just an idle tale. They doubted. Peter had to actually go and look for himself. He had to experience what had happened. A first glance at the tomb wasn't enough. The explanation of the resurrection wasn't enough.

So, if you find yourself here, unsure of what the Easter story is all about...you are in good company. But, acknowledging how tough it might be to understand this story doesn't do anything to help with the question...what does it all mean?

I was told growing up that to be a Christian you had to believe that this event, Christ's death and resurrection is THE event.

So, we would explain the Easter story as Christ died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead so that we might have eternal life if we believed it to be true. No further explanation was needed. That was the end game...the appropriate explanation.

But, the problem for me was that simply stating this belief didn't change anything within me. It felt hollow...just words I was told to say and to believe. It didn't help me understand why Christ had to die and why the resurrection mattered. It also seemed like a flimsy way to be a card carrying Christian.

Because we know that words are just words. And faith is so much more than words and explanations. Faith is how we experience the cross – how we live day to day – how we apply our belief. It's how we allow ourselves to look into that empty tomb (once, twice, three times...how ever long it may take) and realize that something extraordinary has taken place. It's how we begin to live differently because love came down to be among us and overcame death and pain and suffering.

So let me ask you this...why are you a Christian? That's a big question, so let me narrow it down a bit...what shifted in your life so that you saw something about God's goodness and love that transformed you and made you want to be a part of this thing called faith?

Now, when you answer that question, you probably won't explain it theologically. You probably won't use big, scholarly words and you probably won't quote from a textbook. You won't give me a trite explanation. What you will most likely do is tell me about a time when you were in the hospital room with your sick spouse and you prayed for healing and something that day shifted. Or you might tell me about a peace that came over you when you felt deep despair and loneliness and you fell on your knees in prayer as you put it all in God's hands.

You might say that in those moments you understood something of the pain and suffering of the cross. That you hoped for relief and only when you prayed did you find a pathway forward.

One of the things that has always inspired me about the Easter story is that even Jesus had to put things into God's hands. Remember that on Maundy Thursday, before he was arrested, Jesus pleaded to God, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." At first, Jesus was afraid...afraid to face what was to come. He was broken, out of options, and not wanting to face what was ahead. Then he puts it all in God's hands..."yet not what I want but what you want." Not what I want but what you want. Jesus turned his life over and trusted in God. That's the first lesson for Easter. Jesus was broken and he prayed to God. He trusted even though at the time, he couldn't know exactly how that prayer would be answered. But he turned it over anyway.

The second lesson is that God showed up. God showed up at the tomb and healed the brokenness and pain. God's love overcame all of the death and all of the destruction to show the world that all things are possible when we build our lives upon faith, trusting in God's abounding love for us. And when we believe that love, when we allow ourselves to experience

that love, we begin to learn what true transformation is all about, especially in our most vulnerable and broken moments.

I have heard story after story of people giving everything over to God...Women who got out of abusive relationships because they finally found the strength to say no more. Alcoholics who finally admitted they needed help. People healing toxic family relationships that had crippled them for years. Others who made significant life changes because they were digging themselves into a hole of stress and anxiety. Every time I listen to their stories, the same theme comes forth...they finally gave it over to God. When they had no more answers, when they had lost hope, when they were broken and afraid...they fell on their knees and said God I can't do this on my own. Take me and remake me. Transform me into your new creation.

Can they explain to you how it happened? No. But they can show the results of how they have transformed. They can tell you about peace and forgiveness and mercy and grace. But how it works? They simply had to experience it and give God a chance to break through.

When I think of how many times I have found myself on my knees...when I was out of answers, out of energy, struggling to find hope within myself, when I had no words and all I could do was pray, "God help me." In those moments, I imagine putting everything I am, everything I have at the foot of the cross and allowing God to pick up the pieces. Remembering that even Jesus was broken. Even Jesus called out. And God loved him back to life.

And so when we say Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen indeed...we acknowledge that out of the broken pieces, out of the pain, out of the suffering, God's love shown down and lifted Jesus out of the tomb, into new life, a new creation, a new beginning.

So when you hear those words, Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen indeed hear them as an invitation. And invitation to experience something of this miracle in your own life. Broken and healed. At the foot of the cross and at the empty tomb. God is there and Christ is Risen!