

Easter – April 24, 2011
Awakening Grace: Where We Discover Life

Gracious God, may these words be your words of grace and joyful celebration. Amen

Was it a morning like this when the rumble and alleluias of resurrection first began? Or was it a morning with flowers and gorgeous colors and surprises left by the Easter Bunny? Admit it – how many people have already eaten chocolate this morning? Was it a morning like this with sounds of joy and our noses full of an aroma of fragrant flowers? Was it warm and humid, cool, dark?

On that first Easter it was still dark when the women made their way to the tomb. The aroma they smelled was of the spices they carried with them to give Jesus a proper burial. It had been a hellious week. They were exhausted and broken hearted. But this was the least that they could do for their dear friend. They still didn't understand it. When he entered Jerusalem, it seemed as if he was determined, single-minded in what he had to do. They could see what was going to happen. They tried to stop him. They loved him. But it didn't matter. He ended up on a cross. He was dead. They felt empty. They couldn't stop crying.

But they had to do this. There would be guards. How were they going to deal with that? There would be a huge stone in front of the tomb. How were they going to move it? But they went anyway. When they arrived they discovered that the stone had been rolled away...and the tomb was empty. They, shocked, kept looking at the space where they had laid him. He just wasn't there. Two men in dazzling white robes appeared and asked, "Why do you search for the living among the dead?" They reminded them that Jesus had said he would raise from the dead. At this point in Luke's story you would have expected the Alleluia chorus singing up a storm as background music to the men in dazzling robes. But what happens next is anti-climatic. The women go to tell the apostles and they believe it to be "an idle tale",,, AN IDLE TALE!

In the Gospel of Matthew the telling of the story is much more dramatic. An earthquake rolls away the stone. Soldiers are scared away. Jesus greets the women on the way to the apostles.

In the Gospel of John, Peter and another disciple actually raced to the tomb to see for themselves. Jesus meets Mary in the garden for a bitter-sweet farewell. But with the original version Luke's story – it ends with "They believed it was an idle tale."

If we had been in the tomb that day, would we have been joyful, scared, perplexed? If you had been an apostle, would you have said, "Prove it.?" Would you have seen it as nonsense?

I believe that the resurrection is anything BUT an idle tale. It is a foundational truth about our universe, and our lives. The end is never the end. There is always possibility

of new life. There is victory over all the deaths in our lives, jobs, relationships, hopes for our children, all of them.

One of my favorite Alice Walker books is The Color Purple. Ceile is a woman living in rural Georgia. She grew up being abused, was brought into an abusive marriage. Everyday of her life is hard. She becomes silent to the world. But she writes letter to God. She sees God as a faraway God and sometimes wonders if God is asleep. Then, one day she finds a whole trunk full of letters from her sister Nettie. Nettie had disappeared from their home so long ago. Ciele thought she was dead and had lost all hope of ever seeing her again. Ciele's husband had been hiding the letters from Ciele for years upon years. When she found the letters, she experienced great joy as she reads, "I am not dead. I am alive. I love you." And those words changed her life. Simply put, on Easter day and every day these are the words of life that Jesus tells us, "I am not dead, I am alive, I love you." We discover that God is not a far away God. Because of the miracle of resurrection God is in our very presence – ALWAYS – ALIVE. Do we live our lives as if the resurrection is an idle tale? OR are our lives instead filled with Alleluias, hope, always reaching for Christ?

1. We treat the resurrection as an idle tale when we leave the stone over our hearts. That boulder cuts us off from God's message. That boulder blocks our lives from God, from others, from our kin, from all of creation. And our hearts become small. This past Friday was Earth Day. This past week was also the anniversary of the oil spill in the gulf. Our earth is trying desperately to repair itself. Our dependence on oil draws us into wars. Our life blood has become dependent on things of comfort and not God. All of creation becomes objects to move around as on a chess board instead of life to love. Roll away the stone, and make the resurrection a reality on our lives.
2. We treat the resurrection as an idle tale when we are without direction. The scripture tells us that the women were perplexed. Literally translated from Greek, this means "without direction". We are paralyzed, we refuse to take risks. We stand in fear when we don't believe in life rising. We become people without courage.
3. We treat the resurrection as an idle tale when we look in all the wrong places for life. Just as the 2 men in the tomb as the women, "Why are you in THIS PLACE searching for Jesus?" We have to ask why we are searching for God, for life, for love in places that leave us empty. It is as if the song, "Looking for love in all the wrong places" is on instant repeat in our lives.

When I pastured in Walker, Louisiana, there was a woman named Marjorie Short. I visited her all the time. She lived right behind the parsonage. Because of complications due to her diabetes, she was pretty limited in what she could do. Most of the time she watched soap operas and began to head into a real depression. She ached for company but had very little. Over the course of time, her daughter who lived up north, had a baby. Though they could not come to visit, the daughter would send video tapes of the baby. In stead of soap operas, Marjorie began to watch video tapes of that baby everyday. In the

morning she would pop in a tape and watch it over and over again. It gave her such joy. Marjorie was beginning to live in the midst of new life. Every time I would visit she and would show me a tape of something new her granddaughter had done. She adored her. On Palm Sunday, early in the morning, I received a call that Marjorie had died at home. Holy week was hard. All that grieving, all those “what ifs” & “if onlys”. On Easter morning I baptized her grand daughter. That baby looked at me with those same keen eyes as Marjorie’s...and promptly spit up all over me – robe, stole, every where – The family began to giggle, the whole congregation laughed, I laughed. The place that had been a place of burial, had become a place of joyful baptism.

Resurrection is all about birth; it is hard, there are labor pains, it is messy ...and joyful. Resurrection names all the difference in our lives. It opens our hearts to the mystery and miracles of God. It helps us to know that God is present... Even in the midst of all the Good Fridays in our lives, Sunday’s coming – ALWAYS. That means that God gives us birth, new light, now love, new hope. Jesus says, “I am not dead, I am alive, I love you.”

NOT an idle tale. Powerful Truth . GO LIVE IT.