

April 4, 2010
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Luke 24:1-12
Easter Sunday

They, We, and Resurrection

‘They’ came to the tomb on the first day of the week – Sunday.

‘They’ came to the tomb – at early dawn – while the first glimpses of light were beginning to emerge from night’s darkness.

‘They’ came to the tomb at early dawn – bringing with them the spices that they had prepared to complete the burial rite.

‘They’ came to the tomb on the first day of the week – bringing with them the spices they had prepared – and there ‘they’ found

The stone sealing the tomb rolled away from the entry.

The body they had come to honor – missing.

And while ‘they’ were perplexed and wondering what could be going on – ‘suddenly’ two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them – turning their confusion to outright fear.

‘They’ had come to the tomb. ‘They’ are surprised by what they find – and terrified by the appearance of these two who say to them

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

‘They’ remember his words. ‘They’ recall how he said to them that the *“Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”*

‘They’ who have now remembered ‘his’ words – ‘they’ return from the tomb – to tell – what they have seen and heard.

And those who hear ‘their’ story think it is just non-sense.

The story of Haiti

‘They’ were going about the routines of their days – working – going to school – making meals – caring for their children.

‘They’ were going about their daily routines – the same kind of daily routines you and I find ourselves in – washing clothes and paying bills – playing with friends outside and looking in after their neighbors.

‘They’ had no idea that their world was about change.

Then at 4:53 p.m. a magnitude 7.0 earthquake rocked their world and tore it a part.

In the days that followed.

‘They’ would dig through the rubble searching for missing loved ones.

‘They’ would pick through the ruins of their homes and businesses looking for anything salvageable.

‘They’ would abandon the city for the safety of the country side.

‘They’ would become desperate for medical aid, food, and water.

‘They’ would bury family members, friends and even those they didn’t know.

‘They’ would know death – over 220,000 deaths -- they would put Vaseline in their noses and wrap their faces in bandanas to try to keep the stench of death from overwhelming them.

There is some comfort for us in the ‘they’ – for the ‘they’ who experienced the horror of that earthquake – and the ‘they’ who experienced the confusion and fear of that first Easter morning – it is not ‘us’. We are able to stand at a distance – to see – to hear – to wonder – but we remain at a safe distance.

Our story

John Buchanan, pastor of 4th Presbyterian Church in Chicago, has been watching church sanctuaries fill to overflowing on Easter Sunday for four decades. In that time he says,

“I have concluded that people turn out on Easter not entirely out of convention and custom, but because at the deepest level ‘they’ want to hear a word about life in the midst of death.”¹

Is it true – that we have come – to hear a word about life in the midst of death?

Or is Easter’s message – of an empty tomb – of life from death – of resurrection – somehow premature.

That maybe the power of this message can only be heard by those who know the reality of death; – a group of women who go to a tomb on early in the morning to finish the burial rite for their friend Jesus – a Haitian nation who was going about their business when an 7.0 earthquake changes everything.

Or maybe death’s reality is not so far away.

Emma Jo was born last Sunday – too early – too small – 2lbs 7 oz. While she is doing well – she is much too fragile – death much too real.

A woman shared with me in the last couple weeks about a co-worker has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Another woman is living into the uncertainty – unfamiliarity of surgery that will change her life forever.

The news tells us of unimaginable horrors

- killings of classmates and co-workers
- savage attacks on defenseless villagers
- the intended and unintended consequences of war
- epidemics that decimate populations of people leaving orphans by the thousands
- bellies bloated by hunger

My sense is that we do not have to look too far to find someone around us this morning that has experienced the death of a mother – a father – an aunt – an uncle – a nephew – a niece – a friend recently.

... at the deepest level 'they' want to hear a word about life in the midst of death, John Buchanan says – and I believe him – but the 'they' that he is talking about is not somebody else – it is us.

In Haiti

Some of the first images that emerged from Haiti were the images of death and devastation. We saw men and women – boys and girls with bloodied bodies looking for medical help. We saw the empty eyes and the distraught looks. We saw the fear and the desperation.

We also saw something that surprised us.

There in the midst of all that – we saw people gathered together in the streets and on the hillsides. They were singing – not funeral dirges – but songs of joyful praise. Their bodies were not still but they danced – they raised their hands.

Foolishness in the face of death?

We

‘We’ know the reality of death. And today ‘we will sing and maybe to dance – ‘we’ will have our Easter feast and celebrations – for ‘we’ are people who had heard the report of the women – ‘He was not there – but has risen.’ ‘Life triumphs over death’.

For Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

In Jesus Christ, friends, there is only life. Life for today. Life for tomorrow. Life forever.

In the story of Jesus’ resurrection there is no ‘they’ only ‘we’ – we who hear the good news of life. ‘We’ who dance and sing and celebrate even in the midst of death all around us.

‘They’ have come from the tomb this morning – to tell us that life – God life – has triumphed over death.

‘He is not there – but is risen.’ – And so today we sing and maybe even dance for --

For Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

ⁱ Buchanan, John M., The Christian Century, March 23, 2010, Editor’s Desk ‘Raised Up’.