

From Memory to Hope

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1 Corinthians 15:19-26

15:19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

15:21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being;

15:22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

15:24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Luke 24:1-12

24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

24:3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.

24:4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

24:5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

24:6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,

24:7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

24:8 Then they remembered his words,

24:9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

24:10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other

women with them who told this to the apostles.

24:11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

24:12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Proclamation of the Word

The women were perplexed when they find that Jesus is missing. Can you imagine? That's what happens when those we treasure go missing. Then the men in dazzling clothes start talking to you. Terrified. Luke writes, "Then they were terrified." That is a strong word.

We live in a Good Friday world in which there is much fear. "Terrified" is not too strong a word for how the people of Brussels felt this week. "Terrified" is not too strong a word for how the people of Ankaraⁱ, Libyaⁱⁱ, and Baghdadⁱⁱⁱ felt after bombing attacks. In fact, more people died in each of those cities than those in Brussels from violent extremists in the past few months; yet, those three attacks received no headlines. But they, too, must have felt terrified.

I had the privilege of hearing my friend Todd Green speak this week on the fear of Islam. While our fear antennae are up because of such attacks, he reminded us that you and I are more likely to die in a car wreck, or by being crushed by a dresser and furniture, or by being shot by a toddler, than to be killed by a violent extremist statistically speaking. If we watch the 24/7 news cycle, we can be terrified constantly by the narrative we are presented there. The story we hear is not usually good news. When the news is good, we rarely hear it.

I heard a good news story that received little traction right before Christmas. In Kenya, armed extremists who were part of al Shabab stopped a bus full of people near the Somali border. When the extremists ordered the passengers off the Bus, demanding they separate into groups of Muslim and Christian. The Muslims refused to separate saying, "kill us together or leave us alone."^{iv} Some Muslims even gave their garb to the Christians to protect them. They remained united as Kenyans. And only a deserter was shot. The Muslims had saved the Christians lives. That is good news.

The gospel of Luke offers us a different narrative to shape our lives than the one we are presented much of the time. We hear that Jesus overcame death and the grave, "He is Risen! He is risen, indeed!" Yet at first they were perplexed, terrified, and just as the disciples reacted, many times this is how we react, having a hard time believing good news. Luke tells us, "They thought it an idle tale and they did not believe them." Luke is the most honest of the gospel writers. In fact, an "idle tale" is a very nice way of saying, the disciples thought it was a bunch of bull. The Greek word means something like the manure that we spread for fertilizer at the farm.

At first, the women are afraid, rather than dazzled by the men in white. The men offer these important words, "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day -rise again."

Remember, they say. Memory has the power to help us center back on what is real, to catch our breath in our anxious fear. Remember what Jesus said. "Oh yeah," they think, "he said this would happen."

Do you ever catch yourself doing that?

Look back and remember the good old days. If we are honest, they had challenges just as we do now. Prior generations worked through their challenges, too. People had to work at it, make sacrifices, and face difficulties. When we remember that, we can hope again.

Or we remember the way our loved one used to be. Now we see their suffering, their physical health deteriorate, their memory become cloudy, and we realize that there are worse things than death. We remember the promise of resurrection, and we can hope again.

Choose to immerse yourself in the story of Jesus rather than the story of the pundits, politicians, and profit seekers. It will change your life. Luke tells us about Jesus. Remember with me...

Greg Carey^v reminds us that quite early in the story, Jesus identifies himself as bringing the reign of God through his acts of healing and liberation, his teaching ministry, and the

people, the community that forms around him. He shares that these activities will eventually lead to the cross. In his last hours Jesus continues this ministry by seeking blessing for other people rather than calling attention to himself. Did you know that in Luke's Gospel up to the very end, Jesus is seeking other's well-being and blessing others around him?

Just a few examples. Did you know???

During his final meal, Jesus reaches out to express his prayers for Simon Peter, who is in for a very rough night (22:31-34).

During Jesus' arrest a disciple cuts off the ear of one of the high priest's slaves. Only in Luke does Jesus heal the slave (22:50-51).

On the cross Jesus asks God to forgive his tormentors (23:34).

Luke tells us that Jesus cares for the criminal, dying and afraid upon the cross, saying, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43). Luke's Gospel shows more interest in Jesus' companionship with sinners than do the other Gospels, and here Luke makes clear that the men crucified with Jesus are actual criminals, something that isn't clear in Mark.

Jesus came to bless, to heal, to bring sight to the blind, and set the oppressed free. And in his resurrected life he continues to do so through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is our Risen Savior, the real deal.

Bill Self writes,

The historian Arnold Toynbee in his monumental work "The Study of History" notes that there are four kinds of saviors that have appeared on history's stage. There is the savior with a scepter who is a politician, the savior with a book who is a philosopher, the savior with the sword who is a military leader, and the savior who has presented himself as a demigod. However, they all have succumbed to the last enemy (death) - they died. The Christian faith contends, and I agree, that the only savior who is qualified to deliver us, bring us hope, and to save us is Jesus of Nazareth, the Galilean carpenter, because he is the only one to conquer death.^{vi}

Sometimes we have to remember who Jesus is, remember our story, so that we have hope.

The great theologian, Augustine wrote in the 4th century, "Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song." We are a people of hope. Remembering what is true, real, excellent, beautiful brings us hope.

In Atul Gawande's book *Being Mortal* he tells the story of a physician named Bill Thomas who wanted to remake a nursing home. Thomas was not only a doctor, he was a farmer. Gawande writes of Thomas, "From the first day on the job, he felt the stark contrast between the giddy, thriving abundance of life that he experienced on his farm and the confined, institutionalized absence of life that he encountered every time he went to work." Thomas decided that the answer was "to put some life into the nursing home the way he had done in his own home - by literally putting life into it." He managed to get a grant to bring dogs, cats and 100 birds into the nursing home. He encouraged staff to bring their children to work. They planted a garden, built a playground and started an onsite childcare center.

The result? Thomas said, "People who we had believed weren't able to speak started speaking. People who had been completely withdrawn and nonambulatory started coming to the nurses' station and saying, 'I will take the dog for a walk.'"

Gawande notes, "The lights turned back on in people's eyes." ^{vii}

The lame walk, and the mute speak again. So often we feel powerless over death, or broken relationships, or our loved one's troubles, or the problems of our community. So often we are not only hanging out in the cemetery looking for the living among the dead, we are going through life looking for the dead among the living. But we are Easter people, and we can face our fears together. God is with us in our fear, and gives us strength and wisdom to address those things that need mending in our lives.

Through Jesus the tomb is not the end of the story, but a new beginning. Resurrection can happen in the present not just in eternity.

Remember. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. I am living water, the bread of heaven. I came to save sinners, heal the sick, put people in their right minds and clothe them. I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. Jesus came to bless

others, and keeps doing it, sometimes through his children. Even if you think these things are part of an idle tale, may you be curious enough to go and see for yourself like Peter. I hope you are amazed at what you discover.

Remember "Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song." We are a people of hope. The story is not finished.

How will you write the end of the resurrection story?

How will seek the well-being and blessing of others in Jesus' name?

ⁱ Extremists target the military www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/17/ankara-explosion-turkey-injures-large-number-of-people-reports-say

ⁱⁱ Extremists target a Police training center www.rt.com/news/328154-libya-police-bomb-killed/

ⁱⁱⁱ Extremists target the military www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/isil-launches-major-offensive-outskirts-baghdad-160228080044646.html

^{iv} www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35151967

^v Greg Carey, "Luke's Interpretation of Jesus' Death" March 22, 2016 at huffingtonpost.com

^{vi} William Self, discusses Toynbee in "Is There Any Hope?" April 8, 2007 sermon at day1.org

^{vii} Jill Duffield, "The Preaching Pressure of Easter is Real" in *Looking at the Lectionary*, March 21, 2016.