

Going Home Amazed

Laura Smith Conrad

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Fort Hill Presbyterian

Isaiah 65:17-25

65:17 For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

65:20 No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

65:22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

65:23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.

65:24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Introduction

Friends, on Thursday night, we gathered with our Lord Jesus taking part in the Last Supper. And then Jesus took a towel and washed his disciples' feet. He commanded us to love one another as he did. And he broke and blessed the bread and offered us the cup, giving us of his own body and blood.

On Friday we witnessed the trial and the torture of Jesus. And we walked with him to a cross watching him suffer and die for the sin of humanity while all he offered was love, forgiveness, and grace. Then the sky turned black and our Lord breathed his last. We stood at a distance and watched.

A man named Joseph placed him in his own tomb. And throughout Saturday, the earth was dark and still, mourning and grief overcame them.

Now listen what happened...

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

You Can't Go Home Again.

The title of the novel by Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, came to mind as I drove up I-85 towards my hometown of York, SC.

It had been ten years since I have been home except for Christmas dinners with the family or a funeral. Some roads had changed, and I got a little lost in my own hometown. Have you had that experience?

As I rode around the back roads with my brother,
 I discovered York has a Roundabout of all things!
 Not just one, but two! The traffic circle was my brother's idea.

Driving through I noticed that the Post Office was brand new, the old Post Office was the new Library and the old Library was the Clemson Extension office!

My brother lives in our family home which has been renovated.
 My bedroom is a laundry room, so they did not make me sleep there.
 The garage is now a beautiful kitchen.
 Everything has changed- in a good way.

Have you ever had that happen?
 You go somewhere familiar and it is not at all how you expect or remember it?
 How many of you were born and raised in Clemson?

Even if you never left home, you understand, as you probably remember a different town in a different time.

Soon after my mother died, I felt strange in her renovated house.
The grief was too new.

Today Mary and the women go to the Garden to Jesus' tomb.
They are ready to prepare a dead body, but the stone is rolled away.
Inside is empty.
They must have thought that
Jesus' body must have been stolen.
They are distraught.
I would be.
Nothing is as they expect it.

Maybe you felt that way on Monday as we watched broadcasts of Notre Dame Cathedral burning.
Perplexed. Horrified.
I felt that way Monday when I saw the vandalism at Midway Presbyterian in Anderson.
And a few weeks ago I felt that way when I read about 3 Black churches being burned in Louisiana.
Perplexed. Horrified like the women at the tomb.

Then I read the Scripture for today.
God sent messengers, two men in dazzling clothes.
Standing beside them- not far away.
And the women were terrified.
I would be terrified after seeing my Lord tortured, whipped, hung on a cross, left to die.
Wouldn't you?
And you know what the messengers said?
REMEMBER

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that this would happen.

Remember he told you he would be handed over to sinners and be crucified- the execution style du jour.

But remember what he said at the end?
On the third day he would be raised.
Remember?

I certainly need messengers to help me remember sometimes.

And God keeps sending Messengers. It is God's M.O.

At the very beginning of the gospel, God sends angels to announce the births of John and Jesus.

The Angel announces to Mary that she will have a child who will be the Son of God.

Of course, like the women at the tomb, she was terrified, but the angel said, "Do not be afraid, God will be with you."

After Jesus' birth God sends angels first to shepherds in the fields announcing,

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy!"

God sends messengers into the darkest times,

people to stand right there beside us in our grief and fear.

They help us remember what God has, can, and will do!

God can raise the dead. God can raise you and me.

And God seems to go first to those who are not in positions of power or social standing, but to priests,

peasant girls, shepherds, and now to the women followers of Jesus.

I do not know about you, but I need others to help me remember.

When Notre Dame was burning, I saw a video of people gathered singing songs of faith as she burned.

The singing reminded us that God is present in the darkness and will never leave us even as churches, cathedrals, and Temples fall.

His people, the Church, is the Body of Christ, not the building.

We worship a Risen Lord.

And then I remembered that the spire was only 200 years old.

The stain glass windows were replicas and could be recreated.

And then when we saw the gold Cross shining amidst the devastation,
we could remember again.

God is always creating, making new, bring the dead back to life.

Then as a result of the donations for Notre Dame came pouring in,

others of us remembered those burned churches in Louisiana,

and the money came pouring in for them too.

In times like these we remember that really, we are all in this together,

more similar than we are different, more kind and loving than the headlines tell us.

Before I left last week to visit home, I sent a text to my brother and sister in law, telling them I would like to work at the cemetery on Friday, clean up the headstones and footstones of the Smith family plot.

For years, the centipede grass and black lichen had grown over the stones.

With her usual wit, my sister-in-law Terrie replied, "Girl, those people are not complaining. My yard, on the other hand, needs attention!"

And that is true!

Was I looking for the living among the dead, rather than serving the risen Lord?

But I wanted to remember my loved ones, like those Easter women,
by doing one of the only things I could do to serve them.

Easter would mean more to me if I could restore that white Georgia granite to its intended beauty.

That would be my Easter gift to my grandparents, parents, and brother.

Remembering somehow puts us back together again, re-members us,
makes us whole in mind, body and spirit.

Jesus knew this.

He told us at the Last Supper, "This is my body, given for you, and my blood, shed for you. Do this in Remembrance of me."

So that you can be made new again through my life-giving grace.

Sometimes we might be terrified and bowed down like those women at the empty tomb, but God sends messengers to help us remember.

When we remember we can hope again. We can believe again.

The men in dazzling clothes reminds us of those words from Isaiah,

God is about to create.

Former things shall not be remembered.

Be glad, rejoice forever, in what I am creating.

God transforms ashes and dust into living things like you and me.

God remembers us and makes us new.

Remembering gives us hope.

Going home again was not all rainbows and unicorns.

I remembered sorrowful and tragic things.

At the cafe where we had lunch, my brother introduced me to his friend, Paul,
as his sister, the preacher,
Paul responded, "I only have one problem with lady preachers..." saying he had a hard time hearing
women.

But in my memory, I was back home a young woman in high school,
remembering that the men who led our FCA at the school, one a pastor and one a coach, whom I love,
still believe that I do not have a right to speak about Scripture or share the gospel.
In their minds, women should only be able to teach children.

But then I remember this Scripture today.
It was first to the women that God entrusted the message of the Resurrection.

It was when they remembered Jesus' words, not the words of men,
that they went back home and told all this to everyone!
Jesus' words are what matter.
These were the first preachers to give witness to the resurrection.
And as I have experienced sometimes, the women were not believed.
To them it was crazy talk, an idle tale.

BUT Peter,
Peter, he must have had a hunch that they were speaking the truth.
When Peter messed up, he messed up big time, like denying Jesus,
but when Peter gets it right, boy, he gets it!

Of all the rest, only Peter jumped and ran toward the tomb,
when he took the risk of believing the women,
he received the gift of amazement, joy.
He went home a changed man, a believer, whose hope was restored.

I wonder how many of us miss out on what God is doing because we refuse to believe the messengers
God sends our way?

We would rather keep things as they are, leaving no imagination for the way God might be creating a
new thing.

Rather than renovating the family home for functional and happy living for those who are living there now, we leave it the way it was, and create a museum.

Rather than trying new ministries in the church,
we hold onto sentimental notions about the way things used to be.

Rather than confronting the evils of our society or our own complicity with sin, we leave people imprisoned in cells of poverty, racism, and suffering.

Rather than confronting death and the cross today by walking through the suffering and injustice with Jesus, we miss out on witnessing Resurrection.

I have seen the dead raised. People come back to life.
(Luckily, not at the cemetery last week.)

For example, last year we faced the reality of shutting down our campus ministry and shuttering the Student Center.

We had one year's funding left.

But like Peter, you had faith to go and see,
to believe the messengers enough to imagine what new thing God was doing,
and then you stepped out in faith,
believing in the mission of sharing the good news with college students.

I had my doubts at time about our capacity to do this,
but I know God can raise the dead; so God could find a way.

AND here is some good news. To date we have raised 1.2 Million dollars-
to provide a sustainable source of ministry dollars!!

I think that deserves an Alleluia?

And to top that off- a couple of those pledges are from current students- one a Senior who pledged \$100 for three years.

I was shocked, amazed like Peter.

And you all did that in faith, unselfishly, generously-
so that those yet born may praise the Lord.

God is good, amen?

If we listen to God's messengers, we cannot help but share the good news.

We cannot help but go home amazed!

So maybe Thomas Wolfe was wrong, we can go home again,

but everything will be changed.

God is creating and doing a new thing....and we are the messengers that know what God can do! God raises the dead!

So we must go back home, amazed, to tell all the rest the good news!

Alleluia?

Alleluia?

Amen.

Prayer

We exult in your love, O God of the living, for you made the tomb of death the womb from which you bring forth your Son, the first-born of a new creation, and you anointed the whole world with the fragrant Spirit of his resurrection.

Make us joyful witnesses to this good news,
that all humanity may one day gather at the feast of new life
in the kingdom where you reign forever and ever. Alleluia! Amen.