

“There go those excitable women again... <eye-roll> <knowing glance to another disciple> <raise of the eyebrows>” It seems as if they should know better, but here’s the thing: that “idle tale” position is an increasingly popular one in the church. We have a hard time believing in the miraculous nature of God. We too, are skeptical and unconvinced, hesitating to listen to those who have seen. What might happen if we listened and believed? When have we discounted the experience of someone else as an “idle tale?” Why? How can we offer space in our hearts to believe that God is still doing the work of resurrection? How can we boldly echo the women who witnessed the resurrection?

Prayer: Lord, may we always hear and believe and proclaim the truth of the resurrection. Amen.

Sermon Notes



Series: B-sides

Sermon: Let My Love Open the Door

Acts 12: 1-19

“About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, ‘Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.’ He did so. Then he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’

As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. On recognizing Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, ‘You are out of your mind!’ But she insisted that it was so. They said, ‘It is his angel.’ Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, ‘Tell this to James and to the believers.’ Then he left and went to another place.

When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.”

Monday: Read Luke 2:21-24, 36-38

If it were a baptism in a contemporary church setting, Jesus would *not* have been the child dressed in an expensive silk baptism gown that grandma had bought. This would have been a ceremony by a quiet set of humble-looking, poorly attired parents who, by all outward appearances, would disappear from the Temple – and from the consciousness of everyone in the Temple – about as quickly and quietly as they had appeared there in the first place. And yet, here we have a very different story. Anna, who worshiped in the temple night and day for years waiting expectantly for the redemption of Jerusalem, is probably not what Mary and Joseph were expecting, but Anna sees the baby and recognizes the promise of God, sharing the good news of this child with all who wait and watch with her. Where and when do you encounter a prophetic word from God? In what ways are you proclaiming this Good News? How might you more faithfully watch for God’s promise in your life?

Prayer: Help me God, to bear witness to the fulfillment of your promise in this world. Amen.

Tuesday: Read John 4:7-42

There is such richness for us in the familiar story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well – a story of Jesus in conversation with a woman who was considered an enemy of the Jews of his day. It seems important that Jesus engages in this theological discussion with the Samaritan woman. It seems more important that this woman Jesus engages with is an enemy of his people, that she leaves this encounter so transformed that she forgets the jar and the water, that she tells everyone who will listen of this man she met who is the Messiah. And then we arrive at the end of this passage and learn that Jesus decided to stick around in the Samaritan village for a couple of days with these Samaritans, and we are reminded that we too are called to bear witness...and we are called to do so even or especially among those who are different from us, with whom we disagree, even among those with whom we have been enemies. How do we do that? Maybe there is a clue for us in this last section where we hear that Jesus “stayed there two days.” Jesus made himself vulnerable by agreeing to be their guest and in the resulting deepening of relationship, they were able to receive for themselves this marvelous gift of faith. I wonder what it would look like in our communities if we could find ways to allow ourselves to be “guests” of those to whom we are called to share this Good News? Especially those who are different from us? I wonder what we would learn about them or about us or about them and us together if we did so? And I wonder how it would shape the telling and the hearing of the gift we have to offer?

Prayer: Loving God may we bear witness to the Good News of your grace where ever we go with whomever we meet. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Ruth 1:15-17

Ruth’s story is a compelling one. The Bible reminds us eight times in four chapters that she was a Moabite woman. That was the Hebrew writers’ way of telling us that Ruth was not Jewish by birth and, subsequently, was not entitled to the privileges and benefits of those who were born and raised as Jews. She was hopelessly lost, and the entire weight of the law stood between Ruth and any hope of survival or significance. There was plenty working against her, but God was up to something. In

the midst of overwhelming tragedy, Ruth seeks to remain with Naomi, refashioning her family and her faith through her pledge to her mother-in-law. This vow to stay with Naomi carries her to Bethlehem, planting her, as an ancestor of David, firmly in the fertile ground that would give birth to Christ and reshaping our own sense of who belongs in God’s family. How is God redefining family for you? In what ways does family strengthen your faith? How might God use your family to bless those around you?

Prayer: God, may we experience the blessing of family in all the ways you intend for us. Amen.

Thursday: Read 1 Samuel 1:4-20

At one time or another, some of us have perhaps been tempted to pray for “a sign.” Maybe a few of us have been not just *tempted* to pray for a sign, but we have petitioned God to show us something tangible that will help us make some big decision. We long for a voice from a burning bush like Moses or blindness on a Damascus road like Paul. Of course, mostly it doesn’t work like that. The fact is that the work of God emerges from the cracks and fissures of ordinary people like Hannah who cannot see past the grief of this moment, but somehow find a way to cry out to God in their distress, who find a way to give to God the very thing they have longed for most, and in the process find something different than they imagined. What word do you long to hear from God? In what circumstance do you need to be honest and real? How might God be speaking to you in the midst of your experience?

Prayer: God, help me to give you my sorrow and grief, so that I might be filled with you. Amen.

Friday: Read Judges 4:1-10

When the Israelites had gotten themselves into a jam with their evil actions, they cried out to God, and God heard their cry. And so, God came to Deborah, and told her what to do. The fact that Deborah was a woman is something to note, but it isn’t the point. The point is that God had once again heard the cry of God’s people and was once again liberating them from oppression, this time using Deborah. God does wondrous things for us – even when the jams we’re in are jams of our own doing. AND, God does wondrous things by calling upon people. People like Deborah. People like us. Sometimes God calls upon the elderly, like Abraham and Sarah. Sometimes God calls upon the morally compromised like David and Paul. Sometimes God calls on young women, like Mary. And sometimes he calls upon ancient female judges sitting under a palm tree. And God sets things in motion. Great things. Wondrous things. With us, and for us. What great and wondrous things might God be setting in motion through us in this place? How will we respond?

Prayer: Holy God, use us to bring hope and healing, peace and justice, love and grace into your world. Amen.

Saturday: Read Luke 24:1-11

“But these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them.” The disciples thought they were offering an “idle tale?” Jesus, their Lord and friend, had died on Friday. It’s now Sunday. Women – other friends and disciples of Jesus – come to the disciples and tell them that Jesus has risen. And they thought it was an “idle tale?” How condescending, right? We can imagine the disciples’ silent conversation: