

For the Women Tell Me So  
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The United Church of Broomfield  
April 21, 2019 – EASTER SUNDAY

Luke 24: 1-12 (NRSV)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 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. 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.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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.

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Halleluiah, Christ is Risen.

How do we know? Because several women said so.

If you haven't had the good fortune to worship with us in the last 7 weeks, you may not be aware that we've been hearing God's Word based on our recent book study on *Back to the Well, Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*.

We've talked about the Canaanite woman, the hemorrhaging woman, Jairus' daughter, Martha and Mary, the Bent Woman, the Samaritan Woman and last week, Carissa and Jennie preached on the Adulterous Woman.

What have we learned?

We've learned that women were routinely marginalized, degraded, abused and de-valued – all as a part of the norms of the times. Women were often silenced. Women rarely were allowed to speak for themselves but were spoken for. They were regularly unnamed because it's easier for them to disappear in the crowd.

We've learned that for far too long, patriarchal powers have manipulated the texts in order to frame women negatively. Women have regularly been erased from the Biblical narrative; their participation and contributions have been minimized, if not removed altogether.

Men have tried to remove women from Jesus' ministry at every turn, but when times got tough – when Peter denied Jesus and when the men ran in fear, it was the women who stuck around. It was the women who financially supported Jesus' ministry.

*Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. – Luke 8:1-3*

It was the women who had come with him from Galilee, who followed behind Jesus to the cross and knelt at his feet as his battered and broken body hung there.

It was the women who wept at noon; as darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two....as Jesus cried out to God and took his last breath.

On Saturday, despite their grief, the women honored the Sabbath.

Today, we're at the tomb...with the women. Because that's where God and Jesus have had them the entire time – in the mix of it all! In all four Gospels women were the first to receive and proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

What does Luke say of the women....

THEY came to the tomb, taking the spice that they had prepared.

- In the midst of what must have been paralyzing grief, they set forth to do what had to be done; care for the body.

THEY found the stone rolled away from tomb.

- Clearly something was amiss. It was THEY who had come to anoint and care for the body, so who could be there already? In fact, no one was around, making it even more suspicious and dare say, ominous? Yet they were courageous.

THEY went into the tomb --- and did not find the body.

THEY were perplexed.

- Of course, they were perplexed. Their expectations were completely turned upside down. But remember, perplexity in reaction to the amazing work of God is common.

THEY were terrified at the sudden appearance of two angels.

- Would you be under those circumstances?

THEY were told – HE IS RISEN

THEY were asked - Why are you seeking the living among the dead?

THEY were reminded – Remember YOU WERE THERE.

THEY REMEMBERED!

- They remembered Jesus saying, “The Son of God must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22).
- In the midst of all of that fear, confusion and joy they began to remember; they had been there all along - disciples of Jesus from the beginning of the journey; there for the lessons, the parables, the miracles, the dangers and now the resurrection.
- THEY WERE WITNESSES

THEY got to it – sharing the good news

- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them RAN to the other disciples and all the rest. “HE IS RISEN! Jesus is risen, today! Everything that he said has come true.”

Men did not believe them. [How shocking]. Men did not trust them. [How disappointing]. The same men who had been there, just like they had, refused to believe them. So, Peter went for himself and what did he discover – THEY WERE RIGHT!

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Have you ever considered that the primary reason we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead is because of the witness of those women who saw the resurrected Jesus with their eyes and then told others what they had seen? Their witness set into motion for many the ability to say, “Yes, Jesus is alive. I saw him.” In fact, the apostle Paul wrote that not only did Jesus appear after his death fully alive again to the apostles, but eventually to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time (1 Cor. 15:5-6).

As the church grew, the testimony of these women and the other eyewitnesses was critically important. In Acts, Peter tells some Gentiles who had gathered in the home of the centurion Cornelius about Jesus, and Peter, referring to himself and fellow believers with him, said, “We are witnesses to all that [Jesus] did both in Judea and in Jerusalem.” Then Peter tells of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and how after that God “allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses.” And this is but one of at least ten references in the book of Acts alone to eyewitnesses affirming the resurrection of Jesus.

Obviously, no one in the 2000+ years since has seen the resurrected Jesus in the way those women and the other eyewitnesses did, but the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus is based, in part, on the testimony of people who had in fact seen him.

The early church was careful to assert that testimony frequently. They wanted to be clear that the risen Christ was not some fanciful idea that they had cooked up after his death, but someone whom they had seen with their own eyes. Those eyewitness reports are primary evidence.

The notion that those early Christians made up the Resurrection is far harder to support. First, you’d have to believe that more than 500 people all agreed not to reveal their secret. When can

you tell any group a secret and not have it leaked? Then you'd have to accept that many of these people subsequently went out and devoted their lives to telling this lie at great personal risk, with many of them dying horrible martyrs' deaths rather than give it up. No, that just doesn't wash. It makes far more sense that they saw what they said they saw. Their experience was real; not some idle tale. And that certainly explains why many of those people went to their deaths singing the praises of Christ, willing to sacrifice everything.

We are a long way removed from the eyewitness testimony of Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James; and we live with a natural skepticism about anything that defies the known experiences of life, sometimes unless it's specifically our own lives. In the normal course of things, resurrection is not one of those known experiences. To be sure, we've known of people to be resuscitated after heart stoppage, but to be resurrected after being in the grave three days? Never.

Occasionally, however, the reported observations of someone we trust may cause us to consider possibilities beyond our realm of experience. Let's say, for example, that we heard that a well-known celebrity had died and three days later had arisen. We'd probably assume it was some kind of stunt and wouldn't believe it. We'd also consider the source of the report. Normally, I'd make some sort of reference to "the National Inquirer," but in today's world some of even the most reputable news sources are undermined as fake news. Would it matter if a celebrity resurrection were reported in Time, Newsweek, The New York Times or The Washington Post. We'd probably still be skeptical but given that those news sources try to be objective, we'd at least consider whether it could be true.

And now suppose that in addition, a trusted, levelheaded, smart friend of ours happened to be visiting at the time, and she told you she saw the whole thing happen. Would you believe her? Let's say she actually saw the celebrity stuck by a taxicab, and even tried herself to render assistance, but discovered that the man was dead, sustaining injuries no one could survive. Our friend remained in town and three days later, heard the news the man had arisen and actually saw him in the flesh.

Our first reaction might still be to wonder how our friend could be so gullible. But if she stuck to her story and it was supported by those trusted news sources, there would probably begin to be some cracks in our skepticism.

But here's the thing: Even if we were finally convinced, what possible difference would it make to our world that a celebrity had been resurrected? Even if it were true that he had been resurrected, so what? How would the world be any better off? And what possible difference would it make in our lives?

But now suppose that the resurrectee was a person of deep faith in God who had spent his life doing good, who had promised to fulfill human hopes for peace, justice and healing. And suppose that he had said that someday he would defeat even the last enemy, death, not just for himself but also for everyone who trusted in him. He was a person whose acts of mercy

somehow irritated the powers that be so that they arranged for his execution. Three days later, however, he reappeared, fully alive.

Now our trusted friend comes and tells us that she has seen all of that. If our friend succeeds in getting past our skepticism this time, then that resurrection makes all the difference in the world, for it means that if we crave peace, justice and healing, this resurrected person is one who can deliver it. If we fear death, this resurrected one can assure us of life beyond the grave. His resurrection gives us every reason to trust that everything this person said before his death is true.

Proof? --- no  
Witnesses? --- yes

Can you see now what Mary Magdalene's, Joanna's and Mary's eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection did for us? They told what they had seen, they stuck to their story, they preached the good news and in many cases, verified what they had said by forfeiting their lives rather than deny the truth they had seen. Despite their marginalization, their oppression, their degradation and being denied their God-given existence – they still witnessed.

And that has provided us with grounds for our faith in Jesus Christ. Not scientific proof, mind you, but reasonable grounds. Being a disciple of Christ today is a matter of faith to be sure, but it is faith supported by the testimony of eyewitnesses.

The great Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel once wrote, "There are no proofs for the existence of the God of Abraham. There are only witnesses."<sup>1</sup> The same is true about the Resurrection.

Proof? --- no  
Witnesses? --- yes

We in the 21st century have only the record of their testimony. We still don't understand how resurrection fits into our scientific and experiential understanding of the world, but thanks to Mary Magdalene, Joanna and the countless other women of the Gospels who dared to tell the story no matter what, it comes to us down through the ages bearing the ring of truth.<sup>2</sup>

And if the Resurrection is the truth, then we have every reason to believe everything else Jesus told us, and to live - and die - by it. Let us hear the voices of our fore-mothers on this Easter Sunday, the holiest of Christian holidays, for it is the point upon which all the rest of Christianity hinges.

Halleluiah, Christ is Risen Indeed!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/selected-writings-abraham-joshua-heschel>

<sup>2</sup> [www.parishpublishing.org](http://www.parishpublishing.org); "Eyewitness Testimony"