

2016-03-27, Brian Bolton
Shalom Mennonite Congregation
Luke 24:1-12, Easter
“Stooping to a new level”

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body.^[a] ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women^[b] were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men^[c] said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.^[d] ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But 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.^[e]

An Idle Tale

When I lived under the same roof as my parents, my dad would often come home from a new experience or an encounter with someone else, and want to tell me the story. And sometimes it took awhile. I'd like to think that taught me how to be patient and how to listen. But I realized at some point that he wasn't just telling me because he wanted me to know. Later that day or week, maybe with mom, or someone else in the community, or maybe even on Sunday morning, he would tell the same story, but it would be better. He was practicing on me.

In fact, I think he practices a lot, on a lot of people, and I think that's how he came to be a really good storyteller.

I can appreciate that, because we've all been caught in that moment when we're telling a story, or worse, a joke, and we realize we've either

1) left out a really important detail to understanding the story,
2) we've forgotten the end of the story or the punch line,
3) or for some other reason, the person we're talking to just isn't with us. Maybe they're nodding their head and saying uh-huh, but you can see in their glazed eyes the reflection of a distracted mind, whether they're thinking about breakfast or trying to read a text without being noticed.

It can be so demoralizing when you thought you had something to tell, but instead of bringing life to the conversation, there's your story, laying in pieces, dead on arrival.

Maybe that's the definition of what Luke calls an "idle tale." A story stopped in its tracks.

What stops me in my tracks in this story, are verses 10 and 11.

"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."

What did they tell them? Well, they told them what the other two men told them. They'd already been "told" by two men, and they go and tell some other men what they'd been told, and then they got "told" for it. The words "idle tale" ring a bell for me, because it seems like just one level of condescension above something like "wives tale." Basically the sexism is obvious!

The point is, there is something keeping the men from hearing the story, and maybe that thing is sexism, hubris, pride. Privilege is the word we're hearing a lot these days. Check your privilege.

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Bodies Matter

I know what you're thinking. (actually, I don't know what your thinking, but that's just a rhetorical move propose to hypothetical question). This is Easter! Why am I talking about sexism? We've got cinnamon rolls to eat, and a celebration to get to. Why can't it just be grief that the apostles are dealing with?

I'm talking about sexism because, for one thing, it seems blatant (I mean, even the "two men" who remind the women of what Jesus said, seem to be doing a little "mansplaining.") But the other reason I can't avoid it is because of what this whole story is about. The women come to the tomb looking for a **body**.

Someone they know and love just died. And like most humans for most of history, the body is a really important part of processing that death and the loss, and moving past it. As writer and funeral director Thomas Lynch says, "it's by getting the dead where they need to go, that we get the living where they need to be." Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes that there's been no form of humanity discovered that doesn't share a pattern of gravemaking and cemeteries and the like.

And so, if bodies matter that much to us in death, how much more do they matter to us in life?

That's exactly what three *other* women were thinking two years ago when they created the Black Lives Matter movement. These three women, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, had just heard about the death of one more black man in the steady stream of news about the deaths of black men, and like the other three women in our story, they decided to show up on the scene. They came with an extraordinary message: that it is "state violence" that perpetuates black poverty, black imprisonment, the "unique burdens" of black queer and trans folks that are easily disposed and fetishized, and state violence which created the burden of a history of "Darwinian experiments" for black folks with disabilities.

They say these things on their website, and they say, "when black people get free, everybody gets free."

Or in the context of this story, it could be said, "when black bodies get free, every body gets free."

Bodies matter. In death and in life.

Stooping down

But like the men in this story, much of the public, myself included, has a learning curve in understanding what the Black Lives Matter movement means and is

about. Certainly there are those who outright reject their ideas and remain totally unopen to seeing a new way. For them, the stories of these women are as idle as they come.

Then there are people with good intentions who have adapted the phrase to something they perceive to be more inclusive, like "all lives matter," etc. But these three women remind us that to do that is to remove the specific target of systemic violence toward black people that this movement is designed to eradicate. In other words, to do that is to whitewash the necessarily particular history and particular experience of injustice of the people they seek to save.

I say all of this on Easter morning because, when I got to the part of the story about an idle tale, I thought, "Hmm. What's keeping me from seeing and hearing and internalizing the story that we tell on Easter? What's keeping me from seeing and believing that God brings life out of death. Might I be so privileged, so caught up in my way of seeing, that resurrection sounds like an idle tale?"

Very likely.

But there's another reason that I talk about this on Easter morning. Because it is real and it's particular. Jesus' followers in that day were grieving a particular state-violence which killed him and tried to kill their movement. Just like back then, today we struggle with so many systems of which we are very much a part, and in which to become free or to free others may mean the death of something we love or cling to. We, like all of humanity, struggle with our own mortality and the daily challenges of life. In either our personal or political challenges, it is easy to get stuck thinking our story has stalled out. Become idle.

But this scripture gives us another clue about how we can respond. Peter and the women expected the story had fizzled out on the previous page. Stopped in its tracks. Jesus died. He was buried. So let's take care of the body and get on with it. But this story isn't finished, it won't stay idle; This story demands to move, and it demands we move.

It says that Peter ran to the tomb and stooped down to look in. I imagine his mouth wide open and empty like the tomb. He was speechless. Amazed.

How we respond to this Easter story clearly relates to what particular kind of body we have, and what particular person we are in the story. The women had to speak up. Peter had to stoop down. And there will always be times when all of us need to do both. Whether we stoop down or speak up, both are ways of making ourselves vulnerable.

Speaking up and stooping down are what Christ did that got him killed, because he did both in ways that comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. But it was also how Christ demonstrated the nature of God – that even when we are idle – God is not. God is stoops down to us and raises us up too.

Remembering the Body of Christ

Over the past weeks of Lent, many of you took some risks to be vulnerable with other people. You shared stories from your lives, some in public as in worship, some in smaller settings, or some of you have tried to change something about how you live or how you act. I remember seeing a facebook post about what new habits people were taking or old habits they were breaking for Lent, and someone posted, “I must be too Mennonite. If I can give up something for 40 days, why not just give it up altogether?”

And certainly some of you are thinking about permanent changes you can make in your life. But that discipline, whether we do it in Lent or some other time on purpose, or whether it is forced upon us by the circumstances of life, is part of the process of peering into the darkness of our own lives, and the world around us. and being amazed that Jesus’ body is not there, but is here. Here among us, in this place. Not in a grave back there, or on the other side of the planet, but in this body, gathered here.

Jesus’ body matters.

Your body matters here in this, Jesus’ resurrected body.

Christ is alive among us.

Christ is alive when we gather in Jesus’ name to read and sing the story of our faith.

Christ is alive among us when we are vulnerable with and accountable to each other in covenant relationship.

Christ is alive within us as we remember his words, and we remember each other. What a beloved community we are, and are becoming. Keep practicing your stories, a living rehearsal of the good news of the resurrected Christ in our lives.

Let us sing some more, with number 89 in Sing the Story, "Christ is Alive".

New Member Blessing & Remembrance of Baptism

From the time of the early church, some traditions have baptisms on Easter Sunday. We won't have an actual baptism this morning, but we have a backlog of new members to bless and welcome into our life together, some of whom have been around quite a while, and others who have just come to us recently.

Membership and Baptism go together in Christian tradition. Baptism is typically the symbolic beginning of one's own journey of faith and following in the way of Jesus, and at the same time, our immersion into a new community of people.

I will be the first to admit that Shalom's language can be confusing around covenant and membership. We at Shalom emphasize our annual covenant signing in the Fall, which makes any non-member a member for that year, or makes any member an active member for the year. So, on the one hand, membership is a more permanent way of signing the covenant.

But there's another way I think about membership, which is why today we will all get a little sprinkling and a call for a renewed commitment. We heard Jesus say and we heard in our scripture again today, the reminder to "remember." Remember the words. Remember Jesus. Christian remembrance is not just cognitive recall, but it's actually making something or someone present in the moment.

So as we share in our litany today with these new members and as we receive and share in a reminder of baptism, we are remembering something past and establishing something new here in this space, in the spirit of Christ.

So, I invite forward the new members.

Ben & Sarah Beachy are transferring from Lindale Mennonite

Herb & Sarah Meyers are transferring from Community Mennonite of Lancaster

Rhoda and Norman Krauss are transferring from Park View
Micah and Charlotte from First Mennonite of Iowa City
Judith Wright from Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Oxnard, CA
Jamie Miller, transferring from Park View
Meredith Roof by confession of faith
Daniel Foxvog by confession of faith
Katrina Kennel by confession of faith

So, first, to you who are joining this community of faith, I will ask you all a few questions. As a way to publicly state your commitment to your faith and Shalom.

Since we are on a journey, always in the process of deepening our faith and discipleship, we ask you now; do you affirm your faith in God through Christ? If so answer; I do.

Candidates: I do.

Pastor: As brothers and sisters in this faith community, will you willingly share in the life of this congregation in worship, prayer, stewardship, in service within and beyond this church family, as you are able and led by the Spirit? If so, answer I will.

Candidates: I will.

Pastor: Will you participate in the life of Shalom by giving and receiving love, support in times of pain, doubt, or struggle, celebrating together in times of joy? If so, answer I will.

Candidates: I will.

Pastor: Within this faith community will you seek to live so that your life reflects more and more the life of Christ in whom your life is rooted? If so, answer I will.

Candidates: I will.

Let us share together our collective response printed in our bulletins:

Congregation: We welcome you with joy into our community! We covenant to share with you in friendship, giving and receiving support, praying for each other, living out the way of Jesus, trusting together in the guidance of the Spirit, and making God's justice and love more real in the world.

Let us pray: Our creator, redeemer and sustainer, We are grateful for all of these friends, new and old; for who they are and the way you live and move in their lives. We are grateful for their desire to become part of our community. May

they be enriched by their participation at Shalom and may we call forth their gifts and support their journeys. In the name of the One who loves us and holds us, AMEN

Remembrance of Baptism

Now to all of us, whether or not we have been baptized: this weekend's remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus are at the heart of baptism, which also symbolizes our death and resurrection in Christ.

Before we greet one another with the joy and exuberance of kids on an Easter egg hunt, let us all together rename and renew our faith and our covenant.

Please stand if you are able and take the insert in your bulletin.

For the faith and family into which we are baptized, and for which we are daily gaining a deeper understanding,

Renew our commitment, O God.

To reject what is based in fear and to ever more embrace the freedom of new life that Christ gives,

Renew our courage, O God.

To follow in the ways of Jesus, even at political or personal risk,

Renew our trust, O God.

To commit to discipleship by resisting those forces that defile and demean creation, showing compassion and justice, and making the ministry and life of Christ our own,

Renew our strength, O God.

To be faithful members of Christ's Beloved Community in learning, service, and celebration,

Renew our bonds, O God.

Amen.

**In the beginning the Spirit moved over the waters
and created everything that is, seen and unseen.**

In the rising waters of the flood; all life was given new beginning, through an ark

**In the night of trouble, we were led through the sea,
out of slavery into the freedom of the promised land.**

Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Spirit, in the water of the Jordan

And in the baptism of Christ's death and resurrection

we are set us free from death and

the way has been opened to the fullness of life now and to come.

Amen.