

## *AN UPRISING*

Luke 24.13-35, 45-53

Easter, April 1, 2018

Tim Phillips, Seattle First Baptist Church

### LUKE 24

Now on that same day two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking, a stranger joined them and asked: “What are you talking about?”

The disciples stopped, looking very sad. “Are you the only person in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these days?” they said.

“What things?”

“The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people but he was condemned to death and crucified. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. And besides all this, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

Then the stranger said, “What little sense you have” and he began to teach them.

By now they were near their village and the stranger seemed to be going on.

“Stay with us,” they said. And sitting down to eat, the stranger took bread and blessed it and broke it and began to distribute it to them. And, in the breaking of the bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus and, immediately, he vanished out of their sight.

The two disciples rushed back to Jerusalem and when they arrived, their friends said: “It’s true! Christ has risen!”

Jesus appeared to them and said: “Pay attention: I am sending what Abba God has promised you. Remain here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Then Jesus took them to the outskirts of the Bethany, and with upraised hands, blessed them. While he was blessing them, he was carried up to heaven and

the disciples worshiped the risen Christ. They returned to Jerusalem full of joy. And they were found in the Temple constantly speaking the praises of God.

### *An Uprising*

The great Anne Lamott says that there are three main prayers: Help, Thanks, and Wow. “When all is said and done,” Lamott says, “spring is the main reason for Wow. Spring is crazy, being all hope and beauty and glory. She is the resurrection.”

Anne Lamott is probably exactly the right person to quote this morning since she has such a raucous, irreverent sense of humor. And you have noticed by now that this Easter is also April Fools’ Day.

This hasn’t happened since 1956, the year I was born – make of that what you will. It won’t happen again until 2029 and then in 2040 and, after that, it won’t happen again until into the next century.

So, this is a relatively rare occurrence that we should probably put to some good use.

And I’m thankful to several of you for trying to help me out.

My friend, David Bloom, sent an email that read: “Ha-ha, I fooled you all – Peter, Pilate, and priests – it was the women who knew what was going on all along.”

Aaron Burkhalter handed me a note one day with the words of that Shaker hymn, “Lord of the Dance,” the last lines of which are:

*I danced on a Friday  
When the sky turned black  
It’s hard to dance  
With the devil on your back.  
They buried my body  
And they thought I’d gone,*

*But I am the Dance*

*And the Dance goes on.*

And Aaron added a note at the bottom: “I bet the first Easter was on April Fools’ Day too. HAHAHA! Psych! I’m not really dead! That tomb is empty. You should’ve seen your faces!!!

I did read an article by Miles Townes who said this connection between Easter and April Fools is important because: “As I get older,” he says, “I find I do not trust anyone who lacks a sense of humor ... the ability to tell good jokes (and get them) is deeply tied to our moral imagination.”

Okay. So perhaps Easter on April Fools’ Day is serious business.

And I want to say this morning that I don’t think Easter is some kind of private joke. It isn’t God playing a trick on Death that is an inside joke only certain people are supposed to get.

John Dominic Crossan and Sarah Sexton Crossan say there is big difference between the way we have celebrated Easter in the West and how it gets celebrated by Christians in the East:

*The West celebrates the individual resurrection. Christ rises triumphantly and magnificently – but utterly alone ... The East, on the other hand, celebrates universal resurrection ... Christ rises triumphantly and magnificently – but he takes all of humanity with him.*

Like the ending of Luke’s story, resurrection is *ana/stasis* or, literally *up/rising*. And the image the East created for this is that Jesus breaks into the kingdom of death, destroys all the locks, throws away all the keys, and sets everybody free.

Everybody!

The Crossans’ say this understanding is more in keeping with biblical Judaism, where resurrection was “always corporate, communal, and universal.”

For Eastern Christians resurrection as uprising signals a new moment in human evolution away from escalating violence and toward a “transformed earth.”

In other words, it is not some inside joke God plays on Death by raising *one* person.

It is God instigating an uprising of *all* people.

Resurrection-as-uprising is like God saying: “Look, don’t be fooled by all those things that keep you down – you are free!”

Don’t be fooled by that kingdom of death that tells you there is no point in living because your life doesn’t matter anyway. You are free!

Don’t be fooled by that kingdom of death that tells you your voice doesn’t matter because nobody wants to hear what you have to say anyway. You are free!

Don’t be fooled by that kingdom of death that measures your life by things that won’t ever last because you are free to bless the world in ways that will change it forever.

This is an uprising, after all.

We love to sing “Let Us Break Bread Together.” And that’s a good thing. But we need to remember that it comes to us out of the slave communities of South Carolina. Every time we sing it we are raising those ancestors out of their graves and out of their slavery and claiming our part in an uprising that sets all people free.

I remember hearing a recording of a concert by Joan Baez where she talks about being in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, marching with Dr. King. And on a Sunday morning a young black preacher said “white folks will see us; they will see our joy and see what we are doing and

they will simply come and join us in this movement because they will realize that this is the only place on earth to be right now.”

And she started to sing, “Let Us Break Bread Together.” And as she sang the music slipped into that other old spiritual, “Freedom, Oh Freedom.”

We sing “Let Us Break Bread Together” this Easter morning not because it is Communion but because we are part of an uprising that won’t be fooled by any those new forms of slavery. We are in the resurrection business of setting people free.

And that’s not all. Cherry Johnson sent me an Easter poem by Brian Doyle that says:

*... not one soul on that rainy  
Easter morning long ago cared a whit about theological matters.  
They did not even care if the thin man died and rose again.  
They were there, in clans and tribes and couples, for each other,  
Out of respect and affection, and habit and custom, and because  
They wanted to give their children a thing they couldn’t explain  
Very easily, something to run away from and later back towards,  
Something insistent that didn’t make sense then and still doesn’t.  
Something you can easily disprove and can never actually prove,  
Which is basically the point. We cover it with smoke and money,  
With vestments and learned commentary, with visions and edicts,  
But under the cloth there is only wild hope, to which we give His  
Face ...*

Beloved, please don’t be fooled by the trappings of this place. Don’t let what you think you believe or don’t believe distract you from what is going on this morning. This is an uprising. This is an uprising of wild, untamed hope. This is an uprising of the kind of hope that will not be fooled by all the reasons the world gives you for giving up on yourself or the world.

This is the broken bread of freedom and the cup of wild hope.

Easter this year may fall on April Fools' but this is no private joke.

This is resurrection as uprising.

It's an uprising that includes everyone because it isn't fooled by all the things that separate us.

It's an uprising of freedom that won't be fooled by all the new disguises of slavery.

It's an uprising of wild hope that won't be fooled by despair or cynicism.

Whatever you think is going on here today, this is no joke.

This is an uprising.

And so we come to this table this morning singing the first verse of hymn #330, "Let Us Break Bread Together,"

And today, as we sing, if you hear that voice – if you feel that freedom and that wild hope stirring in your hearts – well, for God's sake and for your own, do not harden your hearts.

#### NOTES

Anne Lamott, *Help Thanks Wow* (Riverhead Books, 2012), 79. Miles Townes, "When Easter Sunday falls on April Fools' Day," *Christian Century*, February 21, 2018. John Dominic Crossan and Sarah Sexton Crossan, "Rising up with Christ," *Christian Century*, January 31, 2018. Brian Doyle's poem is "Easter."