

Text: Luke 24: 1-12
Title: Memory and Proclamation
Date: 04.17.22
Roger Allen Nelson

As near as I can figure I was hit by a car.

I carry the scars, walk with the limp, and I've seen the police report that puts my body 50 feet from the point of impact, but I don't have any memory of the crash or any evidence from eye-witness accounts.

My life changed in an instant but I have no recollection of what happened or how it happened. I have a few faint dream-like images from the first week in the hospital but the actual crash and the subsequent hours, days, and details are a big black hole. I've seen reports of a severed artery and listened to a witness who worried that I was bleeding out, but I can't remember a thing about the crash.

Memory seems crucial for how we form our world-view.

We know who we are by what we remember. We make decisions about the future, in part, based on how we understand the past. We carry memories that shape and wound and encourage. We pass on memories as a way to pass on identity. We grieve when loved ones lose memory – somehow losing a part of who they are. We connect with others through shared memory. We are, in part, an interconnecting-web-of memories.

Which is one reason why the resurrection story is so intriguing. There's sparse evidence, few details, and limited information, but there is instruction to remember what Jesus said.

Consider....

After Jesus was crucified, the hour was too late to dig a trench for a grave. That was the common practice of the poor, but you wouldn't, shouldn't, or couldn't dig on the Sabbath.

So, the body of Jesus was being stored in the grave of a friend. Custom had it, that eventually the family of Jesus would bury the body or put it in an ossuary – a box that holds the bones after the body has decomposed.

Therefore, the women, who'd traveled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, went to the grave to tend after the body – only to find the grave empty and the body gone. There was no telling what happened; no accounting how it happened. The details are a big black hole – save two shiny messengers who chide the women about looking for Jesus in the graveyard and then ask them to remember.

In their words:

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!
Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man*

must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” Then they remembered his words.

Luke’s telling of Easter morning is not marked by trumpets, bells, or the gentle calling of Mary’s name. There is no resurrection appearance. Jesus is offstage, nowhere to be seen; and yet with little evidence but an empty tomb and their memories, the women run back to tell the men.

In the stew of fears and tears, wonder and memory, the women at the empty tomb are the first expression of a post-resurrection faith....

There’s no appearance but there’s instruction to remember.

There’s proclamation and memory.

And, by the way, in the next story in Luke, the disciples on the road to Emmaus don’t recognize the resurrected Jesus as he walks through the scriptures with them. It’s not until he breaks bread that they know him, but he disappears – and then they remember.

Dear friends, there’s an intimate link between faith and memory.

For many of us Easter morning is laced with recollections of family, childhood, and some expectation of what church should be like on Easter. This morning holds the memory of loved ones who have passed. It’s fragile. The opening notes or a lyrical turn are all it takes to trigger a few tears or a flood of memories and longing.

Faith is shaped by what we remember and how we remember. And so, not unlike the women at the tomb, what we have this morning is the proclamation of an empty tomb and a tradition of memory. This morning we come together in faith to remember....

And, maybe that’s it!

When we recount, rehearse, and remember, Jesus is alive among us.

When we follow the way of Jesus,
stumble after the steps of Jesus,
seek first the kingdom of Jesus,
celebrate at the table of Jesus,
and remember the resurrection of Jesus,
Jesus is alive among us. Thanks be to God!

But is that it?

Is that all we’ve got.

Is memory enough?

A few weeks ago, when President Zelensky addressed the joint houses of the United States Congress, he asked us to remember.

Friends, Americans, in your great history, you have pages that allow you to understand Ukrainians now. Remember Pearl Harbor, the terrible morning of

December 7, 1941, when your sky was black from the planes attacking you. Just remember it. Remember September 11th, a terrible day in 2001, when evil tried to turn your cities—independent territories—into battlefields. Our country experiences the same every day, right now, at this moment.

By tapping into our shared memories, he was pleading for unity and help, but he was also acknowledging that “Never Forget” sentiments are impotent.

With every atrocity we say, “Never Forget,”
with every mass shooting, “Never Forget,”
and in the wake of Mariupol and Bucha, “Never Forget.”

But, for Syria, Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yemen, and Palestine the calls to “Never Forget” weren’t enough to stop the slaughter of civilians.

There must be something more than never forgetting.

There must be something more than memory....

Dear friends, if the resurrection is nothing more than a function of memory then it is finally feeble and flaccid. If Jesus lives only in what we remember then we stand mute in the face of this world’s brokenness and grief. If the resurrection is just a matter of memory, then pass the Easter eggs and fluffy bunnies. That’s all we’ve got....

The Apostle Paul puts it this way,

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others.

But! But, if the resurrection is more than memory, if Jesus literally-physically-existentially resurrected from the dead then everything is different, the nature of reality has changed, creation swings on a different hinge, and death isn’t the last word.

Esau McCaully, a New Testament professor at Wheaton, writes this:

The question, “What will God do about the disinherited and ripped apart bodies of the world?” can be seen as a central question of religion. Either give me a bodily resurrection or God must step aside. He is of no use to us.

The depiction of the afterlife in which we live apart from our bodies gives physical suffering the final word. If a Black body can be hanged from a tree and burned, never to be restored again, what kind of victory is the survival of a soul? The mob, then, would be able to take something that even God cannot restore. If my cousin’s body can be ravaged by disease and lost to her forever, does that not render illness more powerful than God?

Wow....

That’s to say that while the women went to the tomb expecting to see the corpse of Jesus, they actually went from one world into a new world. They stepped out of a world where “the weak all eventually suffer under some Pontius Pilate or another, and people hatch

murderous plots, and dead people stay dead” and they stepped into a new world where resurrection is a reality. They entered not some variation of a spiritual life wherein our souls are saved; they entered a new creation wherein grace and mercy and life and *shalom* are ultimately embodied.

For, dear friends, as Jesus is alive, not just in our memories, but loosed on the world,
then our failures don't hold sway but forgiveness does,
then terror doesn't win but peace prevails,
then death is finally trumped by life,
then war may have a day but *shalom* will finally reign.
And, whatever vestige of death you struggle with,
whatever disappointment, brokenness, or addiction,
whatever it is that beats you down,
whatever it is,
it doesn't have the last word, Jesus does.

The actual resurrection is a big black hole.
We don't have memories of the moment or a recounting of the event. However, we do have the gospel accounts of what happened next.

We do have the women running to tell the men.

We do have Peter peering into the tomb and wondering.

We do have our life together in the spirit of Jesus.

And we do regularly remember what Jesus told us.....

But, the resurrection itself is an expression of faith. It is an act of proclamation. It is more than just a function of memory, it is a towering-triumphant-mysterious-miraculous-new-creation.

I believe in the resurrection of Jesus!

This morning we gather in the memory and mystery of the resurrection. We read old stories, practice old rituals, and sing old songs. We remember those whom we love. We gather at the table to “do this in remembrance.” And in doing so we proclaim a new world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sisters and brothers, come to the table of life to remember and proclaim that Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Amen.