

Remember How He Told You

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Luke 24:1-12

The promise is
that there will be joy and gladness.

It says so right here in the first chapter of Luke.¹
If the promise is joy and gladness,
the fulfillment of such a promise,
I suppose,
is happiness and laughter...

not the happiness and laughter,
I am sure,
of the cocktail circuit
nor of the pie-in-the-face comedy routine,
but happiness and laughter
that comes welling up
from that deep place where we are able to believe...
happiness and laughter
that are both spontaneous and genuine...
and infectious.

The Easter question is this:

How do you get from the promise of joy
to the fulfillment of happiness;
and how do you get from the promise of gladness
to the fulfillment of laughter?

The mystery men
said to the women of Easter,

“Remember how he told you.”

Last week
was a good week
here at the church.
Holy Week is almost always a good week for the church...
not a fun week;
but a good week.

It would be almost unholy
to try to make Holy Week fun.

It would be more unholy
to make Holy Week anything less than good.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ
is that the proud will be scattered in the imagination of their hearts.
Right after that,
the gospel of Jesus Christ promises
that the hungry will be filled with good things to eat.

Like joy and gladness,
it says those things
right here in the first chapter of Luke.²

If the promise is a scattering of the proud,
the fulfillment must be widespread humility.
If the promise is good food for the poor,
the fulfillment must be widespread generosity.

The Easter question is this:

How do you get from promise to fulfillment...
how do you get from pride to humility...
how do you get from greed to generosity?

The mystery men
said to the women of Easter,

“Remember how he told you.”

Last week
we worshipped more than the usual number of times
here at the church.
Holy Week is a week
when the church should worship a lot.

Most of our worship
was centered around remembering.
On Thursday night, for example,
we gathered here
to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
It was Maundy Thursday.
In our worship
we read the story
of the Thursday night before Easter
how Jesus took the bread and broke it
and said, “This do in *remembrance* of me.”
Then we acted out the Lord’s Supper
to jog our memory even more.

After that
we read the rest of the story
of the awful things that happened
on the Thursday night
before the first Easter:

Betrayal;
Arrest;
Religious trial;
Denial.

It was a dark night;
but an important night...
a night to remember
important things.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ
is that you and I,
if we choose,
may do what is right.

Furthermore,
the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ
is that if ever we have chosen to do what is wrong
we may now,
if we choose,
live with the certainty that our sin is forgiven.

It says as much right here in the first chapter of Luke.³

If the promise is that right shall be done
and wrong shall be forgiven,
the fulfillment of such a promise,
I suppose,
is truth and sanity.

The Easter question is this:

How do you get from the promise of
doing right and forgiving wrong
to the fulfillment of truth in our world
and sanity in our lives?

The mystery men
said to the women of Easter,

“Remember how he told you.”

We kept the vigil on Friday, you know.
It was only a handful of us,

but we kept the vigil.

It is part of our Holy Week worship.

From 12:00 noon until 3:00 p.m.

we came in groups to this place of worship

and we remember the hours that Jesus was on the cross.

On the hour and on the half hour,

we read the story

so the church will be remembering how he told us.

And on Friday night

more of us gathered for the darkest of all dark worship.

We gathered and,

in a service of extinguishing lights,

we heard yet another account

of the story of crucifixion and death

so the church would not forget how he told us.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ

is that light will shine

on those

who sit

in the dark shadow of death.

And More.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ

is that there will be peace in our lives

and peace in our world.

The Easter question is,

how do you get from promise to fulfillment...

from the shadow of death

to the light of life...

from war of soul and war of world

to peace of soul and peace of world?

We had yet another worship service here during Holy Week.

Unplanned.

Last Tuesday.

Three in the afternoon.

Funeral.

Twenty years old.

Late at night.

Auto accident.

On her way home from work.

Must have gone to sleep.

We have pictures of her here at the church

clowning around with the youth fellowship

on the back seat of the church van

and on the ski slopes.

We also have pictures of her in our home

clowning around with our daughter, Anne.

Most of the worship services of Holy Week
aren't very crowded.
We had a packed house at the funeral.
When a young person dies,
there is almost always a crowd for the funeral.
For many young people
it is their first brush
with their own mortality.

Up front, of course,
there were her parents and grandparents
and aunts and uncles and cousins...
fiancé.
Then,
just behind her family
in both balconies
it seemed to me,
with only a few of their seniors dotted here and there,
there was a sea of young adults
in their late teens and early twenties.

By one standard,
I did a good job with that funeral.
One of the preachers from an Episcopal church
was here to help.
He said I did a good job.
A Methodist preacher was here
to help at the grave side.
She said I did a good job.
Some of you were here
and several of you were nice enough to say
I did a good job.
Most telling of all,
Martha, my wife, was here
and she said I did a good job.
I suspect if my old professors
of Bible and theology and worship had been here
they would have been right proud...
maybe even surprised.

But by another standard,
and I suspect by a standard more pressing than the other,
I failed at that funeral.

Oh, to be sure,
I probably did about as much as could be done
in that setting

for her parents and grandparents
and aunts and uncles.
But when I looked out at that sea of young adults,
I saw nothing so much as grief;

except,
more even than grief,

Like on the women of Easter,
I saw on those young adults
the blank face of perplexity.

They were listening;
but I could tell
they were not hearing.

After the grave side service,
daughter, Anne,
who was home from college for the occasion,
came for a hug
as much, I suspect,
to comfort me as to be comforted.

“I’m sorry, Anne,
I didn’t do that well.
The young people didn’t hear.

I hope your old man
didn’t embarrass you
in front of your friends.”

Then,
with wisdom that no longer surprises me,
Anne said,

“You did it right, Dad,
it’s just that most of them
are not in the church.
They didn’t have any idea
what you were talking about.”

The mystery men
said to the women of Easter,

“Remember how he told you
when you were still in Galilee...
remember what he told you before.”

You know what I should have done at that funeral...

at least for that sea of young adults,
do you know what I should have done?

I should have told them how once
a long time ago
a decree went out from Caesar Augustus
that all the world should be enrolled.
Then I should have told them
how Jesus was born
in Bethlehem of Judea; and
how he was tempted in the wilderness;
and how when he was baptized
the heavens opened and God said,
“This is my son.” and
how he took little children on his knee
and said,
“Of such is the kingdom of God;”
and how he taught us
to turn the other cheek
and to love neighbor as self; and
how he made sick people well
and crazy people sane; and
how when the disciples were in trouble
he walked to them on water; and
how he fed a multitude
with five loaves and two fish...
never mind
that they are not apt to believe
such wild stories as those
just so long
as they know the stories; and
I should have told them
the story of the Prodigal Son
and of the Good Samaritan;
and the Lost Sheep.
And I should have told them
how he demonstrated
that dying for someone else’s sin
is the love
that will keep the world
from self-destructing.

Do not misunderstand.
I don’t think for one minute
I should have pressured those young people
to believe the story.
Rather I should have made sure
they know the story.

...on the first day of the week,
at early dawn,
(the women) went to the tomb,
taking spices which they had prepared.
...when they went in
they did not find the body.
...two men in dazzling apparel
said to them,
“remember how he taught you
when you were in Galilee.”

That means,
if ever we are going to experience
the hope of Easter
we must remember what he taught us
before Easter

I don't know anyone
who first believed in Easter hope
and then believed in Jesus.

Everybody I know
who believes in Easter.
believed in Jesus first.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ
is that light will shine
on those
who sit
in the dark shadow of death.

And More.

The promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ
is that there will be peace in our lives
and peace in our world.

The Easter question is,
how do you get from promise to fulfillment...
from dark shadow to light...
from war to peace?

The Easter answer is,
remember what he taught you.

NOTES

¹ Luke 1:14

² Luke 1:51 and 53

³ Luke 1:75 and 77