

Passover has arrived!

What, do you think you came to the wrong house of worship?

Actually, everything in Luke leads up to Jesus' participation in the Passover liturgy in Jerusalem.

Let me break that down for you.

Beginning with "Passover"

- Back to the book of Exodus.
- Back to the time when the people of Judah--known as the Jews--were oppressed in Egypt
- Back to the time when Moses - one of their own who had grown up as an Egyptian - had an awakening. And after finding himself, answered the call of God to go back and tell the Pharaoh that God says to "Let my people go."
- Back to the time when Pharaoh didn't want to do that until convinced by a series of freaky phenomena that were concluded by the death of firstborn Egyptian boys. The only thing saving the Jewish boys was a covenant blood-sign marked on the doors of their households causing the "Angel of Death" to "pass over" their homes.
- Once freed into wilderness wandering, the surviving community commemorated this liberation with an annual celebration, which came to be known as Passover. It became the most important celebration on the Jewish calendar, because it marked God's power over life and

death; God's ability to set the captives free. Passover marked God's steadfast promise to be present with the Jewish community no matter how bad things got.

Through time, and once Jerusalem became the hub of Jewish religion and culture, the City was the primary pilgrimage point for Jews. People would travel for days to attend the Passover celebration in the city.

Throughout Luke's gospel, Jesus is targeting Jerusalem as the place where his mission will ultimately be accomplished, with the full symbolism of having it occur at Passover firmly in his intention.

His mission is best summarized by the grief he pours out on behalf of this city:

It has become infested by the Roman Empire, and its ways so infected by Roman rule that it can no longer find its center - its ground and being. Jesus' three years of public ministry were focused on calling on people to remember who they are--to remember Whose they are--and to forsake the temptation to drink in the power of those who have overcome them. It is a dangerous mission, one very much akin to what Moses faced against Pharaoh. Yet this time, God wasn't going to send an Angel of Death for some and not for others, this time the Angel of Death would come for one in order that eternal death would once again *pass over* all who believed what Jesus had been teaching and showing.

But the sign of accomplishing such a mission was, in the words Luke uses, **nonsense** to most. Right? When women including Mary of Magdela, Joanna, and Mary mother of James, told the disciples that Jesus had been raised from death to life, “the story seemed like nonsense **and (the disciples!!) refused to believe them.**” (24:11, emphasis added)”

All those years of commemorating the Passover, and yet it was such a non-reality in their minds and hearts, they literally couldn't believe it.

And, I dare say, most of us can't believe it either. If we heard tales of someone we knew, whom we knew to be dead, had come back to life, would we believe it?

Nonsense!

Do you know that this is the **ONLY** place in all of scripture where this word is used? “Nonsense.” And this is the word that is used to describe the fundamental building block of our faith.

How was this not nonsense to the women? Well, it kinda was. Less nonsense, and more confusion. They arrived on the scene when it was still dark-early o'clock, and they found the large stone that had sealed the tomb rolled away, and the tomb empty; “they didn't know what to make of this.” In Mark's gospel they are terrified. With Luke, they are more, and I think this is the right word, **mystified**. Fortunately they didn't have to search for answers for long. Luke tells us that two men in gleaming bright clothing suddenly show up to tweak their memories. If two men in dazzlingly bright clothing sounds familiar, well Luke introduced us to two such folks on the

mount of Transfiguration, when they were identified as Moses and Elijah. Then, Jesus was identified as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. It's a pretty safe guess that Luke has those same two returning here to help the women remember who Jesus was and what he came to accomplish. It worked - they remembered what he had taught / promised them, and they believed!

These women are the first believers. I like to think of them as the midwives of resurrected life. It is super early on the morning after God has had a re-creative Sabbath; unlike any that have been known before. It is not just a new day, or the start of a new week, it is the dawning of a new REALITY! The normal life/death cycle to which the world was accustomed was now broken. And, once reminded of Jesus' promises: "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you..." They did; These women are prepared for it. Notice, it is from them that the story of Jesus' resurrection is patiently worked from the darkness of the tomb-womb and brought forth into the light for all who can believe to see. It makes sense that those who have borne life, are the first to arrive at belief. For them, this is no longer nonsense.

Easter has arrived!

And these women are ready to share the good news. (By the way, if anyone is still peddling the notion that women shouldn't be preachers, please point them to this text - because **women were the first preachers, evangelists, etc!**)

Whether it was the spirits of Moses and Elijah, or a couple of angels, the reminder of Jesus' promises was what the women needed for Easter to arrive in their hearts. For the Eleven, it was nonsense, until something later allowed for belief to take root. Next week, we'll hear the story of the resurrected Jesus breaking bread with two other disciples - opening the eyes of their hearts. As we move throughout the remainder of this Easter season, faithful follower after faithful follower will encounter something of the resurrected Jesus that will transition them into believer. And once you believe that resurrection is possible, a whole new viewpoint on the world opens up to you.

I find helpful these words that were in our curriculum's background material: "our story is one of mystery and awe. It is a story that begs for a sequel, and another sequel after that. It is not a story that ends at the tomb. Rather the story has merely begun." (Contexts and Connections #3-R1 + Luke 24:1-12) For most of us, we've heard this story "of mystery and awe" all of our lives. And it could be nonsense - that is until we discover the agents or the forces that midwife a new understanding of the world.

I was watching an interview from a few years back with Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber. She likens these post resurrections to what she calls *Spiritual Physics*, "Something has to die in order for something new to live." We experience these sequels in our lives, she says, because "God is continually coming to us wanting to be known."

<https://onbeing.org/blog/nadia-bolz-weber-talks-tattoos-resurrection-and-gods-disruption-video/>, ~17:40)

I don't know if God is a big fan of technology or not. But, having had this pandemic move us out from our sanctuary for a year has invited us into thinking about how to stay connected when we cannot be here. In the process, we have been able to include in our fold those who have had to move away, and those who simply cannot physically get here! In our Maundy Thursday spiritual reading of Luke's Last Supper narrative, Bill Henschel, just home from recuperating from a stint in the hospital logged into his iPad (as I'm sure he has done today), was present with us - and contributed mightily to the power of the evening. Last year, we wouldn't have made space for Bill's participation - not because we're mean, and exclusionary - but because an outside force caused us to change and do things another way. This shift may not seem like a great example of resurrection power. But, I can tell you from those who have been able to participate from a distance...in a time of isolation...it has been a lifeline!

That's just one story from our corporate lives. There are so many out there! Again, God is continually ARRIVING in our lives wanting to be known. That's my Easter message for you all today: LOOK for it. LISTEN for it. BE OPEN to it. And, BE READY TO ACCEPT it. Don't be afraid, for

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen, indeed!

And that is no nonsense!

Liturgy for Holy Communion

([Maren C. Tirabassi](#))

Announcement

Today, we will share Holy Communion in morning worship. Those who bless and receive the sacrament at home, please prepare food for yourself, in celebration of the Risen Christ and remembering that our oldest telling of this story is in a letter of Paul to the Corinthian church. Those letters were our faith's early "distance learning." The unusual-to-us services of this past year are firmly a part of our tradition. ...

Invitation (written by Francis)

In Luke, we have two occurrences of Jesus opening himself to others at a table breaking bread. This past Thursday, a small group of us considered the story of Jesus' final commemoration of the Passover seder with his disciples. It was a moment fraught with tension - with betrayal and denial in the air / with death on the horizon. There Jesus offered a new covenant forever sealed when faithful folks break bread and drink in his name.

On resurrection day, Jesus in the guise of a stranger accompanied two disciples on their walk home from Jerusalem. He helped them sort through what had just happened over that particular Passover, and come to an understanding for who Jesus was. And when they arrived

at their home and invited the stranger Jesus to sit at their table, when he broke bread their eyes were opened to who Jesus, the Christ, **is**. Friends, that is why we are here: to continue our own walk with Jesus - as a church, as individuals, as we try to make sense of how we apply what we're learning from Jesus with the world around us. Just as the Easter story is one of mystery and awe, so, too, is this meal. Maybe you know EXACTLY why you're here. Maybe you're not so sure. That's fine, because the one who was once born in an animal hostelry because there was no room for his family in the upper room, has claimed this space for you...and for me...for us...and all who wish to be.

Words of Remembering

We come from heart-felt "Hosannas," and a long season of feeling like withered fig trees.

We come from an alabaster jar abundance of love and hard questions.

We recognize experiences of betrayal, denial, and the feeling that everyone we love has fallen asleep and left us alone, so we recognize this holy story.

We remember Jesus washed feet and offered a covenant of himself broken and poured out for a small group of followers long ago and for us in our time, and was risen on Easter though, even in the joy of resurrection, he kept blessing and teaching, accepting hospitality and giving us hope to eat.

Prayer of Consecration

(as is the tradition in silence or with music playing – breaking, touching or lifting the bread, pouring, touching or lifting the cup)

Host of our salvation and Visitor to our lives, send your transforming power upon this Bread and your freely given love upon this Cup. Risen Christ, live in us that we may live in you. Amen

Pass out the elements - we will commune together

Sharing of the Elements

The Bread on your table is blessed and broken, a meal of grace --
Sharing love, we will never be hungry.

BREAD

The Cup on your table is blessed and shared, like the overflowing of
tears and joy -- Drinking deeply, we will never thirst.

CUP

Prayer of Thanksgiving

In thanksgiving for this meal of grace and in the holy dispersion of
virtual worship, and the holy cautious re-gathering in the parking lot,
we claim the risen Christ's love found on every table. Let us pray ...

O Holy One, we come to you with lilies and tears, with personal Alleluias we whisper that soar like the greatest choir. We claim the resurrection for those we love who are tenderly sheltered in your arms and name the resurrection as your invitation to all the weary, all those who need hope. May our lives become your table in all the world. Hear us as we pray as Jesus of Nazareth, our Risen Christ, taught his disciples ...

Prayer of our Savior ... Amen.