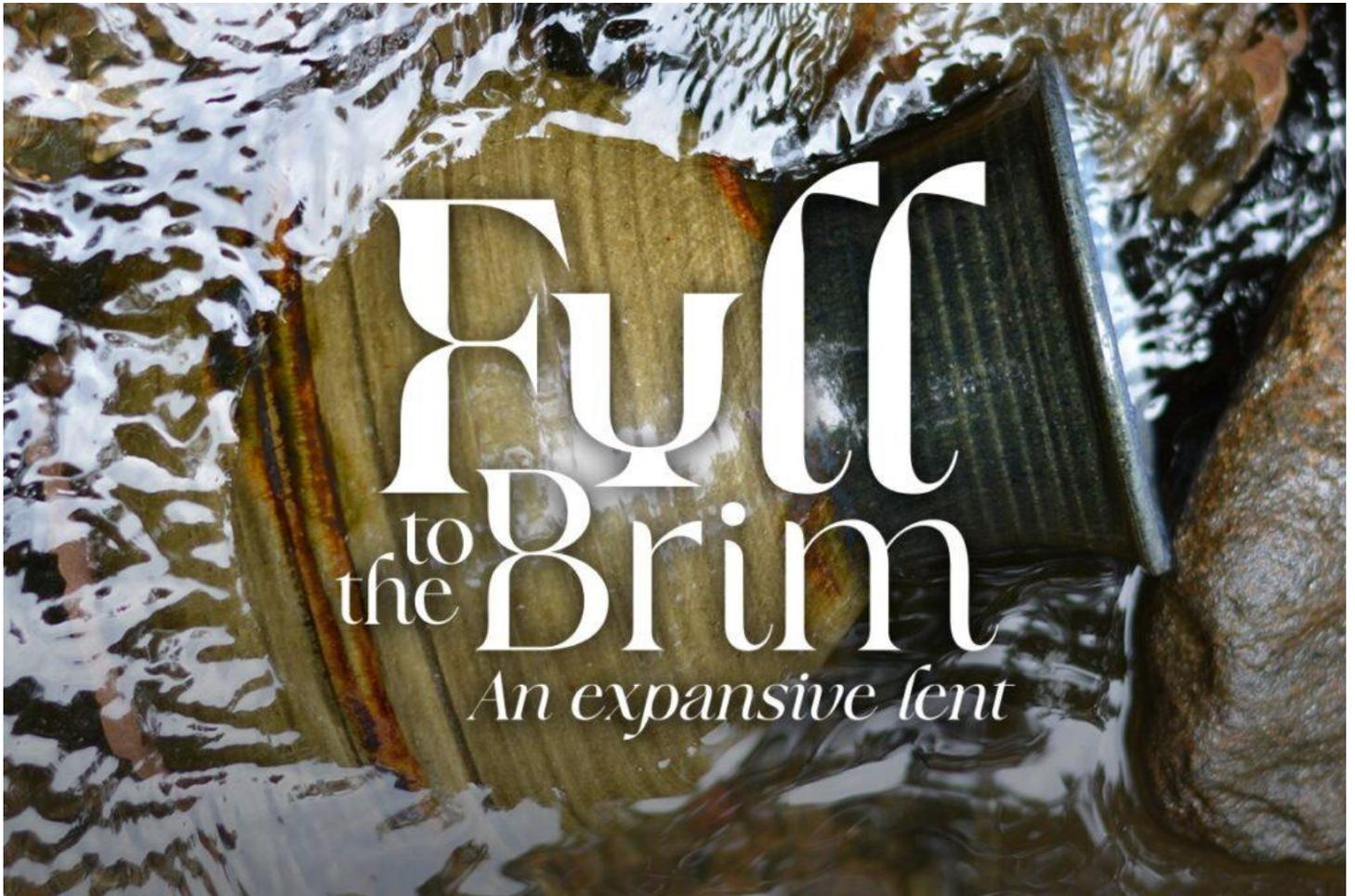


HOPE BELIEVED
EASTER SUNDAY

A Sermon by Rev. Marci Glass
April 17, 2022



Isaiah 65:17-25

17 “See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.
19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.
20 “Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach[a] a hundred
will be considered accursed.
21 They will build houses and dwell in them;

they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
23 They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.
24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent’s food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,”
says the Lord.

Luke 24:1-12

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

THE GOSPEL WRITERS DON'T AGREE ABOUT EVERY DETAIL as they tell the story of Jesus. Joann mentioned that Thursday when talking about the accounts of the night Jesus was betrayed.

One thing all four gospel writers record is that women were the first people to the tomb on Easter morning. The women had been there all along, of course.

They followed the procession to the cross, crying and keening as they went.

They stood vigil and watched as Jesus died.

They accompanied Joseph of Arimathea as Jesus was buried, laid in the tomb.

But now they are there, alone. They have gone to the tomb in the early morning hours to anoint his body, to extend the care and affection we show to our loved ones when they die.

And the women, with some trepidation, enter the tomb that should not be open but somehow is.

We know they won't find tomb raiders. **We know** the tomb is empty.

But the women haven't heard this part of the story before. They've never put on their Easter bonnets and sung “Jesus Christ is Risen today” as we do every spring.

They are standing there, burial spices and ointments in hand, wondering what kind of horrible people steal a body, when two men in dazzling clothes appear in their midst.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”, they ask the terrified women.

As if Jesus 'body being stolen isn't bad enough. Now two men show up and seem to mansplain the wisdom of their burial rituals.

And this is reason 267 I wasn't invited to the tomb on Easter morning, because I would have said, *“We aren't looking for the living. Maybe you did not see him die, Mr. Fancy Shiny Clothes. But I did. I watched him suffer. And I couldn't do anything about it. And then I saw his broken body put right here, in this very tomb. So, as soon as you tell me where you've put his body, you can take your bedazzled outfits and your ridiculous questions somewhere else.”*

Truly, I want to believe one of the women said something like that. But Luke just didn't write it down.

After Marci Magdalene had her little hissy fit, the men went on to tell the women, “He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

They aren't instructed to go and tell the other disciples, as recorded in Matthew and Mark. They are just told to remember.

Remember what he taught them.

Remember who he was.

Remember how he loved them.

Remember how he included them.

Remember how he changed everything.

Because he's really changing everything now. He is not here, but has risen.

And they do remember.

The song Mary sang to them after her visit from the angel and the stories Mary told them about his birth.

They remember when he disappeared as a teenager and they found him teaching in the temple, *as if that were perfectly normal and what was the fuss about anyway?*

They remember his baptism by John at the Jordan, when the heavens opened and the Spirit descended on him while the voice from heaven called him the beloved Son.

They remember what it was like to join his band of followers, to hear him teach and be so compelled by his vision for the world that they abandoned their work to follow him.

They remember the miracles, the healings, the nets full of fish, the calming of the storm, the time he ate at the home of a tax collector.

Mary Magdalene remembers her own healing, what it was like to be free of her demons after living with their voices in her head for so many years.

They remember the stories he told, those weird parables that left them wondering about the meaning, learning to live in mystery, without clear answers.

They remember.

We remember too.

We weren't there that morning. But we have our own stories.

Even if you have not been connected to a church, you have stories that you may not even know are inside you.

Of the time you received grace and mercy when we were expecting judgment.

Or of the time when a near stranger sent a card, or delivered a casserole, offering support or encouragement at the moment we needed it most.

Perhaps you remember the people who taught Sunday school classes, with their flannel board stories of Jesus; or the people who generously invested in your life when they weren't required to (the way your family is).

We remember the feeling of presence in the quiet of a hospital room, giving us strength to sit vigil through the night at a loved one's side.

Whatever our experiences may have been, we are called to remember them. And we share them with others, inviting them to listen for the divine presence in their own lives.

We are like the women at the tomb that morning, whose remembering compels them back to the disciples where they testify about what they have seen.

But the women's testimony seemed to the men to be an "idle tale." This word in Greek, *lairoi*, only appears this one time in the Bible. And it isn't a nice word. It means the men received the women's testimony as the ramblings of delusional, incoherent people.

Ahem.

The women were not, as we know, full of *lairoi*. We know they were reporting their experience back to the disciples who hadn't been there. We know that without their idle tales, we wouldn't have accounts of that early morning.

They didn't tell strangers on the street. They told the other disciples, the one group of people who might possibly have been able to believe such a crazy story. And their story wasn't believed.

And that is a risk we take, when we remember testify.

We share our experiences, regardless of how they will be received, because the good news refuses to remain in the tomb.

And people may tell us we are full of *lairoi*. And that's okay. Because our job isn't to convince anyone. That is God's job.

And it is okay when they tell us we are full of *lairoi* because, in fact, it is a startling story when the dead don't stay dead. *If it doesn't startle us, are we really paying attention?*

People may tell us we are full of *lairoi*. And that's okay.

Our job is to remember. And then to witness.

[Jim Wallis wrote](#): "Hope unbelieved is always considered nonsense. But hope believed is history in the process of being changed."¹

The men may have told the women they were delusional, but as soon as the women went back to the kitchen to prepare breakfast, Peter took off to see for himself. He came home amazed at what he saw.

The women's story had some importance to Peter, if it was true. He'd just denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion. If what the women said was true, Peter could have feared encountering Jesus. Or he could have had hope that he had another chance to get it right.

It became hope believed for Peter, who went on to be the rock upon which Jesus built the church.

Hope believed is our job, even as people consider it nonsense. Wallis writes:

¹ <https://sojo.net/articles/while-men-were-hiding-women-delivered-greatest-news-world-has-ever-known>

“It is not nonsense to believe that weapons of mass destruction are not necessary, and that war is not inevitable.

It is not nonsense to believe that a child’s race and class and sex will not always determine their future share of happiness and well-being.

It is not nonsense to believe that we who have been divided from each other can, and will, one day sit down together at the welcome table of God’s love and God’s grace.

These are not nonsense thoughts. With the Easter eyes of resurrection faith, we can see the door through which we too can walk, through which we are invited, where we also will be given the news of the resurrection.

And with this hope, sisters and brothers, we can know our sins forgiven, and our lives made whole. We can look into the faces of our children and believe there is a future for them.

With this hope we can look into the eyes of the poor, the suffering, and the dispossessed and believe that God is able to establish justice for all. With this hope we can together build new communities of faith that will someday overcome the barriers of race and class and gender. And with this hope we can even look forward to a day when our nation no longer measures its security by its weapons, and its status by its wealth.”

Hope, believed, can be a hard thing to hang on to in a world such as ours, full of bad news and difficulty. And I don’t have a perfect answer for how we do it. I just know it is essential that we seek hope, and cultivate and protect its small flame from the winds of despair and chaos.

We focus in, at a micro level, maybe. I can’t fix the ecological disaster today, by myself. But I can reduce my use of plastics, and pick up trash, and pay attention to my own behaviors, and contact my elected leaders asking them to represent us well. Because hope believed is history in the process of being changed.

I can’t end a pandemic, but I can do what I can to limit its spread. Because hope believed is history in the process of being changed.

As some of you know, my family gathered recently to say goodbye to my father in law, Gordon Glass, who was surely the best father in law ever to live. And my niece, Maya, in her eulogy, shared some words Gordon had written to her in the depths of the pandemic, when she was back at college, but mainly quarantined to her dorm room, filled with anxiety and worry. Gordon wrote:

“The way forward is not always easy to see in times like this, but I have learned that some things are helpful: do good work, see the next person you encounter as the most important opportunity of your day, and finally know that your background will carry you through these times and you will look back and be stronger for it.

I wish you deep laughs, love every day, and peace right now. Love, Grampa”

