

Tracy Daub
4/17/22—Easter Sunday
University Presbyterian Church
Luke 24:1-12

BUT THERE YOU HAVE IT

Easter Sunday is one of the hardest days for us preachers. What can we say about the Resurrection that will make it believable? The entire premise of the day sounds like the stuff of fairy tales or fantasy novels. A dead man comes back to life. This notion can be quite hard for us rational, science-based modern people to swallow. But it was also hard for those first followers of Jesus long ago to believe as well. As I was contemplating my sermon for today, I joked with my husband that I was tempted to make my entire sermon just three sentences: “Jesus rose from the dead. It’s hard to believe. But there you have it.”

“But there you have it.” My job today is not about *convincing* anyone, but rather *proclaiming* the story we’ve been given—the good news of God’s life-giving presence and love. That is the truth we gather here today to affirm. The world *is* a messed up place—that is also a very important truth. But we affirm another more significant truth. God’s life-giving presence is yet more powerful. It may be hard to believe. But there you have it.

This good news is often hard for even us church going folks to always believe because we believe in something else more strongly—the reality of this world’s brokenness. That is easier for us to believe in. The reality currently found in the Ukraine. The reality found in our broken relationships. The reality of racism and injustice, hatred and cruelty, and illness and death. *That* reality is all around us every day and is often easier for us to believe in.

But Easter . . . But Easter. Have you noticed how that little word “but” takes the conversation in a new direction? You will be talking about something and then you add the

word “but” and that little word lets us know to expect something different, something new, something else. The story has more to offer.

That is what happens with the Easter story. Easter provides us with a “but.” The gospel writer of Luke actually begins his Easter account with the word “But.” Let’s recall what Luke has been telling us just before our reading today. Luke has been recording the sad and horrifying details of Jesus’ crucifixion. And Luke ends this passion narrative by telling us that the women who were part of Jesus’ circle of friends accompanied Jesus’ body to the tomb. They wanted to anoint the body with the traditional spices and ointments, but they had to wait because the sun was setting and that meant the Sabbath had begun. And so they went home filled with tremendous sorrow and grief. Like all of Jesus’ followers, like most of us here today, like millions of people around the world, they knew this sad story by heart. It is the story of dashed dreams and hopes, the story of horrible cruelty, the story of brokenness and pain and death. Any hope they had for a different story died along with Jesus on the cross.

But . . . That is the very next word—the very first word in Luke’s Easter account. “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb.” This word *but* comes as a sacred intrusion into the sad story they thought they knew. And Luke’s gospel account is filled with this little yet essential word *but*. Just when we think the story is going in one direction, Luke throws in another “but” that has us listeners zig-zagging between despair and hope, doubt and joy. “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb.” There, they find the stone rolled away. We can only imagine what the women might be thinking at this point—a stolen body, someone up to no good. It had to have distressed them. “*But* when they went in, they did not find the body.” The angels in dazzling white appear to the women and the women are overcome with terror. Fear dominates their minds and hearts. That is where a lot of

our stories end, right? With fear. *But* the angels say to them “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” And the angels add “He is not here, *but*,” says the angel, “he has risen.” The women return from the tomb and tell all of this to the male disciples. What glorious, incredible news they share. *But* the disciples do not believe them and consider the women’s account “an idle tale.” Is this where the story will end, with disbelief? “*But*,” Luke adds, “Peter got up and ran to the tomb.” He had to check it out for himself. We don’t know for sure what Peter thought but something akin to hope must have begun to percolate within him.

Do you see what has happened with all these “buts”? These become sacred intrusions into the painful story of Jesus’ death, and into the painful stories of our lives.

We live in a world dominated by the old story of brokenness and pain and death. However, Easter begins with “but.” Easter is not just a momentary happy interlude in the saga of tragedy and suffering. Easter is a counter-story to the one we know all too well. God’s life-giving power, God’s life-giving love prevails against the darkness. Death is indeed real, *but* God raises us to new life, both now and beyond the grave. Tombs certainly exist, *but* God rolls away the stone. You can find this truth at AA meetings, or in the woman who dedicates her life to helping homeless teenagers finish high school, or in the couple who strives to repair their marriage. Death is real. Tombs exist. *But*, so too is the power of the life-giving God. Death does not have the final word. The God of life prevails.

Easter is about our recognition that God does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. Oh we try, though, don’t we? We do indeed try to provide our own “buts” to change the narrative of suffering and death and hardship. Think about all the remedies we come up with to alter or change the human condition of brokenness and suffering, of sin and death. And yet, no matter how much bran cereal we eat, no matter how many days we spend at the gym, no

matter how much money we amass in our 401k plans, no matter how much we pressure our children to succeed according the world's standards, no matter how great our education or the depth of our common sense, we cannot save ourselves from death, from suffering, from loss, from hardships. We cannot save ourselves from our selfish inclinations, our failures, or the divisions that exist in our families and communities.

Easter is when we celebrate God's sacred intrusion into our brokenness and pain. God enters our lives and world with a "but" grounded in love, in forgiveness, in compassion, in transformation. And God raises us to new life—God raises us to a new way of being in this world and a new way loving one another that can save us right now, right now as well as beyond the grave.

You know, I also thought about calling today's sermon "God's Big But." Yet, that didn't sound terribly respectful! Yet, Easter is the big "but" God gives to counter our belief that brokenness, suffering, pain, and death are the only reality or the most powerful reality in life. Today, many of us may come here following in Peter's footsteps. Peter, who after hearing and even doubting the women's testimony, still had to go check out the tomb for himself. We come ourselves to see if the good news of the Resurrection is true. Hoping that it may indeed be true. Or we come to be reminded that it is true. For a lot of us, like Peter, doubt and hope may exist side by side in our hearts and minds. Experience teaches us that the world is a hard place. Experience teaches us to look out for yourself, that life is about grabbing what you can for yourself. Experience tells us that death wins. *But*, Easter offers us a different version of life. And so we hope. This is the good news we've come today to hear and proclaim. Jesus lives. Jesus lives. And so too shall we. It may be hard to believe. But . . . there you have it.