

Easter Sunday Sermon
3-31-24

Pastor Sarah

I'm going to play you a sermon that I wrote with a good friend of mine, but first, I want to tell you the revelation that kicked off the whole conversation.

In the Gospel of Luke, when we tell the story of Jesus's birth. It says "the time came for Mary to be delivered, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she swaddled him in strips of cloth, and she laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn."

When Jesus is born, there is no time for the typical preparations.

The town is crowded because everyone's there for the census.

She doesn't have a lot of options. She's out of time.

So she improvises.

She finds a place where she knows Jesus will be safe and She wraps him in cloths and lays him in a manger.

Fast forward to Jesus's death when a member of the Jewish High Council, a man named Joseph of Arimathea - a different Joseph not the same as Joseph Jesus' dad - Joseph of Arimathea.

Like Mary was not prepared. When Jesus dies, there's no time for the typical preparations.

The town is crowded because everyone's there for the Passover. The sun's going down, it's almost the Sabbath, and you're not supposed to work or care for people on the Sabbath.

Joseph is out of time.

And so like Mary, he improvisers and he wraps Jesus in strips of cloth. And instead of laying him in a manger, he lays him in the tomb.

In both cases, Jesus, the incarnation of God enters and exits the physical world helpless in a way that people aren't ready for. In both cases, someone who loves him picks him up holds him, wraps him in cloth, and places him somewhere safe.

In both cases, there's also the promise of new life beyond this temporary manger or grave—the promise of new life in this world and the next.

So I had to talk to somebody about this before Easter Sunday—I could not wait! So I called my friend Shawn. Oh, Shaw. Shawn Dromgoole is a Black Pentecostal Bible teacher and preacher from Nashville. He knows the Bible extremely well. And I wanted to hear his thoughts.

For those of you who haven't met Shawn yet, he also runs a nonprofit called More than a Walk, where he brings people together across differences, to do neighborhood walks, teach kids about history, and empower communities to heal.

My conversation with him opened this Sunday Easter morning message in ways that I just had to share with you. So I asked Shawn if it was okay for me to share our conversation. And he said, Of course. I said, Shawn, you're going to preach at church of the Good Shepherd on Easter Sunday!

So I'm going to do a dramatic reenactment of our conversation. It's pretty accurate, especially Shawn's wardrobe, which is always on point. This is how it went.

<indicates phone with hand> Ring Ring Ring.

Actually, I don't have a landline anymore. So it's more like this ring, ring ring. Shawn, I have to tell you about this revelation I had about the Bible. And he said you called the right man. And I told him what I told you. And he said,

Shawn

Watch it, Pastor Sarah. You know I'm Pentecostal. I will shout all over this living room.

Sarah

I said, shout away Shawn! This is an Easter message. We have good news. You know, the women who heard that good news couldn't keep it to themselves. It took the men a while to catch up.

Shawn

<laughs>

Sarah

So this whole thing, Shawn, reminds me of that text where somebody's trying to follow Jesus. And Jesus says, "The Son of Man will have no place to lay his head." Jesus was always living in borrowed spaces, temporary spaces, places that weren't sustainable long term.

Shawn

The manger was not sustainable. The temple was not sustainable. The Mount of Olives was not sustainable.

Sarah

Exactly. Jesus didn't want Peter to create a permanent structure on the mountain where people could come worship him. There was never a place where Jesus was settled. No place he was ever contained. And on Easter, we remember that especially when we remember the resurrection, the women at the tomb and discovered on that first Easter that even the grave was temporary for Jesus.

Shawn

Yes! The grave couldn't hold him, not even death or the gates of hell could hold him. But we can.

Sarah

But we can.

Shawn

The only place he desires to be most is in each and every one of us.

Sarah

And we can make room. We can make room for Jesus the way Mary and Joseph did when they wrapped him in love and kept him faith.

Shawn
Yes!

Sarah

The way the women did on that first Easter morning when they held his teachings and his message with care, even when their lives were in danger. It does seem to me that in all of these cases, there's more to it than just caring for Jesus, though. There's an element of risk. Think about Mary at her birth, and then Joseph, at his death.

Shawn
Both had something to lose.

Sarah

Exactly. Mary, the mother of Jesus risks scorn and abandonment, not to mention all the risks of being pregnant, and then the idea of raising the incarnation of God. And then Joseph faced the wrath of his fellow council members and the Romans, not to mention the consequences of using a borrowed grave to store the body of a convicted criminal. And the women on Easter Sunday definitely risked their lives going to the tomb to care for his body. And they took a risk again, by sharing the good news with the other disciples, they

Shawn
Both took risk to care for the beloved child of God. We talk about how Jesus laid down his life for us...

Sarah

Maybe we forget all the people who laid their lives down for Jesus, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Joseph, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, all the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning, and even Peter, who left the house when the other disciples were too afraid. When he arrived, Jesus was gone. But the strips of cloth were left behind, for Peter to pick up.

Shawn

They found a way. In the time of Jesus, people made room exactly

Sarah

They made room for Jesus. They made room for hope. They made room for miracles, even though none of them was prepared. So how might we put ourselves on the line for other people, for members of the living, resurrected body of Christ? How will we make room? How will we make room for people who have nowhere else to go? People who need a safe place to rest? People who are part of the living body of Christ, part of the promise that despite hardships and even debt, the message of love will continue.

Shawn

People who have no place to lay their heads are now a reflection of Christ.

Sarah

People who have no place to lay their heads are now a reflection of Christ. And Christ is alive in all of those who we meet in the world. And Christ is deserving of care! So how are we going to make room for God's beloved children, especially those who have nowhere to lay their heads? How will we wrap the living body of Christ and in love, and prepare a place for them to rest?

Shawn

In the time of Jesus, people made room.

Sarah

And this is Resurrection Sunday! THIS is the time of Jesus! God is alive! God is still speaking! We can make room we can wrap people in love. And y'all know the refrain....

Sarah and Shawn together

And if it ain't love... it ain't God.

Amen.