

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD | APRIL 17, 2022

ACTS 10:34-43 | PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-26 |
LUKE 24:1-12

A couple of years ago, our bishop told me about a rather strange mindfulness app she has on her phone. A few times a day, the app sends her a notification that says something like *Hey. Just a reminder. You're going to die someday.* These reminders are meant to interrupt our daily routines. So when you're sweating about getting your email inbox down to zero or irate that the coffee shop only had medium roast instead of light roast or wondering why a certain pastor in north Jersey hasn't submitted his paperwork on time—these are hypotheticals—the app interrupts and says, *Hey. Just a reminder. You're going to die someday.*

The idea isn't as weird as it might seem. When St. Benedict drew up his guide for life in Christian community, he admonished his charges to “keep death daily before their eyes.” It can be easy to think that life is something we create for ourselves through our own striving and achievements rather than something continually gifted to us. An awareness of death, Benedict suggested, makes us appreciate the giftedness of life.

I'm not one to argue with St. Benedict—even less so with the bishop—but most days keeping death before us doesn't feel difficult at all. Because it seems to be just about everywhere. An invasion of a sovereign country that's killed thousands. A pandemic that's killed a million of our fellow citizens. An often-ignored famine that's left tens of millions living in the shadow of death. It isn't hard to be reminded of death.

But it isn't just the deceased who are well acquainted with death but all of us living. Because death never strikes any of us alone. It strikes the millions of families who have been forced to leave their homes. Two hundred thousand American children orphaned by this pandemic. Millions of malnourished children. We are the living, but even the living swim in the wake of death. Even if none of us have experienced it in its fullness yet, we are familiar with its effects, witnesses of its power.

And so were the women at the empty tomb. A group of disciples so used to witnessing death that the resurrection isn't immediately good news to them. How do they react when the tomb is empty? They're perplexed. *What's going on here.* When two men in bright robes appear, they're not comforted. They're terrified. *Now it's even worse. Just tell us where the body is.*

It's easy to understand why. To witnesses so much death makes us accustomed to it. Any news is bad news. Any change is bad change. Any interruption is only a disappointment. Death only leads to more death.

Until now. Until a word from these men breaks them out of their disappointment and resignation. *He is not here but has been raised.* And this changes

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everything. Jesus is no longer spoken of as “the body” to be anointed or “the crucified” to be remembered. In fact, Jesus is no longer to be spoken of in the past tense at all, for he still moves and acts in the world, calling these women into the future. *Why do you look among the dead for the one who lives?*

Turn your vision somewhere else, these men suggest. Because by raising Jesus from the dead, God has vindicated everything that these women saw as disciples. Every meal. Every healing. Every teaching. Every parable. God says *Yes* to the life of Jesus. Despite its ignominious end, the life of Christ is not a mistake or a lost cause or a disappointment. It is a human life completely transparent to the heart of God. And not even death can overshadow that.

What the women discover at the empty tomb is not a body. What they discover is a new identity for themselves. That they are no longer simply witnesses to death but witnesses to life. To use St. Luke’s favorite word, “eyewitnesses.” People who have seen firsthand the power of God at work in the world. They become a group of people who do not simply gather to accommodate death but a community that is sent forth into the world to proclaim life for all God’s creation.

So it is this day for us. Yes, we are witnesses of death. But St. Luke tells us that we are witnesses of the resurrection as well. Witnesses of the ways that God continues to bring life out of death within, among, and through us each day. To be a witness to the resurrection does not mean that you saw Jesus rise from death (no one did) or that you saw the empty tomb (maybe a handful did). To be a witness to the resurrection just means that you have seen the power of God working life out of the powers of death. And whenever we gather as God’s people around word and sacrament and are sent to serve the world, God makes us eyewitnesses all over again.

And yes, we are a people who live in the wake of death. But we are also a people who live in the wake of life. Being drawn into the divine life Jesus shares with the one he calls the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Have we experienced the fullness of resurrection? No. But we are familiar with its effects. We are familiar with words of grace and truth, not just lies and death. We are familiar with acts of love and service for our neighbors, not just hostility and resentment. And we are familiar with communities formed around the integrity and compassion, not just exclusion and fear. And the same power that raised Jesus from death on Easter continues to draw us together into the wake of his resurrected life today.

Just like the women who gathered at the tomb, we are a transformed people. A people called together and sent out as witnesses. A people empowered to interrupt the cycles of death that fill our world. And a people with the courage to keep life daily before our eyes, trusting the one who lives.

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