

“We Shall Overcome”

Luke 24: 1-12

Here we are on Easter morning, celebrating the resurrection story of our Lord and Savior, our Savior who leaves the tomb, our Savior who steps out of the darkness, our Savior who overcomes death. We gather on this Easter morning to once again celebrate our Savior who brings us new life.

Yet, if we read Luke’s version of this story, this was not the expectation of the women on that first Easter morning all those years ago. They went to the tomb, ready to prepare the body, ready to encounter death, only to discover a new beginning waiting for them. It was at the empty tomb, where they encountered two men, glowing in white, who simply said to the women, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

The interesting thing to note is that the very next word spoken is “Remember.” I don’t know about you...but if I had just announced that Jesus had been raised from the dead, I don’t think my next word would have been “Remember.” Maybe more like, “Alleluia!” while being joined by a chorus of angels, filling the skies with their song, as was done at Jesus’ birth. Or maybe, just

maybe, as a way to break the tension of the moment, I might have shouted out, “Surprise! I bet you weren’t expecting that!”

But “Remember”.....in this glorious, surprising, unexpected moment when Love and life has overcome death, who says, “Remember”? Where is the excitement in that?

I have to tell you that as I have lived with the text this past week, I have often found myself becoming frustrated with the author of Luke. Being that he is such an excellent story-teller, to end Holy Week like this, leaves me wanting something more from his story, something else that will really bring the power of the empty tomb. Because, you see, the other Gospel authors do such a great job at capturing this poignant moment of faith. Well, except for Mark. Mark tells us that everyone was afraid, going home and telling no one what they saw. That’s why someone down the line decided to add an alternate ending to Mark’s Gospel. But not Luke. Luke does tell his version of the story better than Mark but unfortunately, he leaves so much unsaid. He leaves so much up to our imagination. In the telling of his story of the resurrection, Luke leaves us hanging, wondering what will happen next.

Now, like I said, no one, no one would deny that Luke is not a consummate story-teller. From the very beginning of his Gospel, he has captured our

imagination and pushed us towards faith. In the telling of Jesus' birth, we can almost hear the angel's singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven." We can almost imagine the Shepherds running to the manger, unable to contain their joy, while Mary ponders all these wondrous things in her heart. As Luke's readers, he had us at "Hello". With his persuasive style of story-telling, Luke tells us that he will give us an orderly account, so that we may know the truth concerning the things about which we have been instructed. Translation... No Fake News here! This is the real deal. Everything we hear, no matter how outrageous it may sound, is real. It happened! Luke is not making this stuff up, just so that he can have a best-selling novel attributed to his name.

No, Luke is giving us, telling us this true account of the life transforming power of God's grace in this world, inspiring us with stories of Jesus helping the blind to see, amazing us with stories of how Jesus freed the people from the things that kept them bound and broken. Luke continues to hold our attention as he tells us how Jesus came to bring good news to the poor. Story after story, as Luke's readers, we never lose interest in what he has to say about how Jesus transformed the world, how Jesus transformed others, and in the process of telling us his orderly account, we as Luke's readers are transformed into people of faith, into people who believe the good news. Through everything that Luke shares with us,

we as his readers are transformed into people who understand the power and glory of the empty tomb.

So why is it, that now on Easter morning, at the moment when death is no more, when life and love have overcome the darkness, all Luke can say is “Remember.”

As a frustrated reader, I just want to tell Luke he needs to go back to Creative Writing 101. He needs to understand that after captivating his readers with story after story of how God’s redemptive grace is still at work in this world, as an author, he doesn’t just come to the closing of his story, and simply say, “Remember.” He should have a big finale. An ending to end all endings. He should have added something that will stay with his readers long after we have turned the last page and closed the book. To which, Luke replies, I did... Remember?

Wait, what?! Remember? Taken aback, as we stand at the empty tomb, in shock and amazement, we begin to remember. We begin to remember Jesus’ words to us, “Love your enemies, pray for those who mistreat you. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

While standing at the empty tomb, in shock and amazement, we begin to remember Jesus’ ministry. We begin to remember all those times when Jesus noticed the people on the margins, all those “others” whom people ignored or

forgot. Standing at the empty tomb, we begin to remember how Jesus taught us to recognize all as created in the image of God, that all are Beloved children of God.

Staring at the empty tomb, experiencing the power of the resurrection, we begin to remember that on the night when Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread of new life, he took the cup of the new covenant and said, “Do this in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death until I came.”

As people of faith, as ones who are experiencing the glory of the empty tomb, we begin to remember all that Jesus told us. We begin to remember his promises. We begin to remember that time and time again, Jesus showed us, that Jesus told us pain and death will not have the last word. At the empty tomb, we remember the new beginning which has been promised to us by our God since the very beginning of time.

I don't know about you, but I needed this opportunity to remember all these things this morning as a follower of Jesus Christ. With all that is happening in our world right now, I needed, we needed this moment, this moment to stand at the empty tomb, and remember that our God will not let this world have the last word. As people of faith, people who live in a very broken and hurting world, we needed this moment to re-center ourselves in the story of God's love once more.

Which only makes this morning and the power of the Empty Tomb more significant to how we live out our faith. Because, if you take nothing else from today, please hear this.... if we, as the ones who have been with Jesus since the beginning, we as the ones who have answered his called to ministry, if we as one who walked with him to Jerusalem, saw Jesus nailed to the cross, if we as the ones who have stood beside the empty tomb, experiencing the surprise and wonder of the resurrection, if we as followers of Jesus Christ forget all that God has done and continues to do to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's children, then what hope do we have? What hope do we have of others knowing and believing in this life-changing power of God's grace and love that we all know to be true? What hope do we have of others understanding that God has not left us alone? If we as followers of the Risen Savior forget, then who will remember the promises of new life given to us by our God, long before this world was ever created? If we forget, what hope do we have?

That's the question Luke answers in his approach to the Easter morning story. He reminds us that the rest is up to us. Jesus kept his word to us. Jesus kept his promises to us. And now...and now the rest is up to us. It is time to remember what we are called to do. We are called to share the good news, the good news that pain and death do not have the last word, the good news that love has overcome darkness. Standing at the empty tomb, experiencing the power and glory of the

resurrection, as followers of the Risen Lord, we are called to remember that this story does not end here. The women leave the tomb and share the good news. They tell everyone they know about what they had seen, about what they had heard. They tell everyone that God is still at work in this world, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's children. And this morning and every morning, we are called to do the same.

As followers of the Risen Savior, we are to leave the empty tomb, rejoicing celebrating, knowing that what the world intended for evil, God transformed into good. We are to remember all that Jesus said to us, all that Jesus taught us, all that Jesus showed us and go and do likewise.

Luke responds to all our fears, responds to all our worries by simply saying, "Remember....Know that our greatest lesson yet as people of faith is to remember that our "faith doesn't go from promise to fulfillment. [Rather, instead], it moves from fulfillment to promise [as we remember God's words of hope and grace, given to us by a God who loves more than we will ever know. And all we have to do is look at the empty tomb, to know that this is true. Jesus told the women, Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified and raised on the third day. But they didn't believe him. It was only by standing at the empty tomb, the very fulfillment of Jesus' word, that the followers of Jesus remembered his words to them as his disciples. It was only when they experienced the resurrection in person did they

begin to understand the promises given to them by their God , their God, our God who has the power to overcome darkness and hate. It was only when they remembered the stories and ministry of Jesus that they had the courage to go and do likewise.

Over the last few weeks, as a community of faith, we have completed a journey of sorts down memory lane. We have remembered the story of Rosa Parks. We have remembered the sit in at the Woolworth in Greensboro, NC. We have remembered the courage and bravery of the Little Rock nine. As a community of faith, we have remembered how far we have come and have also acknowledged how far we need to go in order to become the people of hope, the people of love that God created and calls us to be.

So it seemed only appropriate that as we draw this journey down memory lane to a close, that as we celebrate the empty tomb, remembering the story of God's redemptive grace in this world that we also remember another promise, a promise that was put to music over 50 years ago. Now although this song of promise has had many different transformations and versions, at its core, its promise had remained the same.... that promise being that no matter what this world may say, no matter what this world may do, we know, we know that we shall overcome.

It seemed only fitting that we sing this song as our Easter hymn this morning because this promise is not just for a select few. It is a promise given to all of God's people. And the history of this song reflects just that. It has a power to bring people together in harmony and hope. The song, "We Shall Overcome" has been a civil rights song for 50 years now. It has been heard not just in the U.S. but in North Korea, in Beirut, in Tiananmen Square in China, in South Africa's Soweto Township. In the words of Congressman John Lewis, every time, he sang this song in the Civil Rights Movement, and every time he sings it now, it gives him a sense of faith, a sense of strength. It gives him the [courage] to continue to struggle, to continue to push on. When he hears the promise that this song brings, he loses his sense of fear,"

Today, as followers of the Risen Lord, standing at the empty tomb, our faith has moved from fulfillment to promise. We are filled with a sense of strength. We are filled with a sense of courage. Today, as followers of the Risen Lord, as we remember the promises given to us by our God, we lose our sense of fear and know... that Death has no power. Darkness has no power. That only light and Love will reign forevermore.

So it is no surprise that Luke tell us, as he draws his Gospel to a close, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen. Remember." As followers of the Risen Savior, may we never ever forget the glory

of the empty tomb and its power to transform lives because if we forget, who will go out and share the good news? Amen.