

Three R's of Easter Remembering, Returning, and Rejoicing

Luke 24:1-12

April 21, 2019 (Easter)

First Presbyterian, Luling

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! It is a day of celebration of Christ's resurrection and the new life we receive in God's grace.

We read in Luke's Gospel how the women went to the tomb, not expecting anything but a body, carrying the spices needed to anoint that body, the spices that they hadn't had time to use on Friday and were not able to use on Saturday, the Sabbath day. At the first opportunity, they were going to do what needed to be done, though their hearts were beyond heavy.

Even when the women see the stone rolled away, they don't remember what Jesus had said. *Even when* they enter the tomb and don't find a body to anoint, they don't remember what Jesus said. In the fog of grief, their minds are fuzzy and their bodies are tired, and they don't, or can't, remember all that Jesus had said. It's understandable, really. Anyone who has been through a traumatic situation: the death of a loved one, especially a sudden or violent death, knows that the human mind can only process so much at one time. New and unexpected—and, in this case, close to unbelievable--information is just not going to get understood quickly or clearly.

The two men in dazzling clothes, who are obviously—obvious to Luke anyway—angels, have to remind the women, have to help them remember what the significance of the empty tomb is. The two men say to the dazed women: “*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.” (7) And after they hear those words again, words that they had heard from Jesus himself, they *did* remember. They remembered what Jesus had said, that he was alive, risen from the dead, as impossible as that sounded.

I can kind of understand why remembering what Jesus had said was hard for them. Jesus said a lot, after all, a lot that was hard to understand. And did a lot that was hard to understand. And the last week alone had been overwhelming. When a lot of things are coming at you at once, it's hard to sift through and find the ones that need remembering and the ones you can let go for the time being.

When I visited my parents' house over Spring Break in Arlington, one day I left the girls with them and drove to Ft Worth to meet a friend for lunch. Now, I had never been to the restaurant where we were meeting, and it had been years

since I'd been to that part of Ft Worth, but it was vaguely familiar to me. Not to mention, I had Google maps. I looked up the location of the restaurant. Google very nicely gave me directions. I had the route pictured quite clearly in my mind.

Then my parents started to give me all kinds of information that they thought would be helpful. Like what was at that location 25 years ago. And which lane to move into as I approached downtown Ft. Worth. And what my mom ordered when she went to that restaurant a year or so ago. And that the parking lot would be full. And that I was probably underdressed, which I already knew. And that there might be a lot of traffic on that road because it was Spring Break and very near the zoo. They were saying so many things, so much information coming at me at one time, that there was no way I could take it all in. So much of it was not important or relevant, and so I will admit to you that I forgot it immediately. I didn't even try to remember it all.

I went. I got there just fine. I had lunch with my friend. I pulled out of the parking lot onto the very congested street. And then I realized I didn't know which lane I needed to be in so that I could get on the freeway and get back home. And then I remembered. Sort of. I remembered that piece of information had been one of the things my parents were throwing at me as I attempted to exit the house. But I couldn't remember the details. It would have been handy if I could have.

Sometimes we remember things only when we need them. Or when we need to remember them, we realize that what we are remembering was really important, or means something entirely different than when we first heard it.

That's what was happening to the women on that first Easter morning. They had heard what Jesus had said, more than once, that he would be arrested and killed and rise again. But they hadn't understood it, not really. Neither had anyone else. And there was so much to remember about Jesus. Doubtless they had been doing just that over the Sabbath—remembering what Jesus had said and done, telling stories about him as people do when they grieve. But when facing an empty tomb and two angels to jog their memory, they did remember, and it all made sense in a new way. The knowledge they carried with them without actively remembering that they knew it suddenly was crucial and made sense when it hadn't before.

What do they do next, once they've remembered what Jesus said? They return, return to where the other disciples are waiting, and tell them what they have seen and what they've remembered. Now unlike some of the other Gospels, nobody has seen the resurrected Jesus yet, but the women have remembered what he said and believe that he has risen from the dead. I can imagine that they

are falling all over themselves, talking over each other like a panel discussion on a news show, probably not telling what they had heard and seen in the most straightforward manner. The disciples don't believe them, for whatever reason, and think they've made the whole thing up, which is insulting.

But the women have returned, back to the people who would understand, back to the people who shared their experiences with Jesus, back to their home, so to speak, the way we talked about home in the Prodigal Son parable. They return to where they think they'll have receptive hearers, and they get disbelief and ridicule. I think it's significant that they return to their community, though, as this is the very beginning of what will become the church. This community of men and women remember together what they have experienced together, and then set out together to share that news.

Peter must have been listening more closely, or perhaps their story of the empty tomb and the angels sparks his memory, because he goes to check it out for himself. Peter leaves the tomb "amazed," Luke says. I called it "rejoicing" in my sermon title, because it needed a third R to go with Remembering and Returning. Peter goes through the same process. He must have remembered what Jesus said as the women were telling their story, he goes and sees for himself, then he also returns to his community, to the other disciples, and he rejoices, amazed. There has been rejoicing before in Luke's gospel: the woman who has lost the coin rejoices, and calls her neighbors together to rejoice with her. The shepherd rejoices when he finds the one lost sheep. The father rejoices when the prodigal returns home. Rejoicing is what we do, together with those we love, when we feel relief. The coin woman, the shepherd, and the father are all incredibly relieved that what was lost has been found. The women and Peter are incredibly relieved that all Jesus had said about his resurrection was true, relieved that he was alive, as he said, and so they rejoice, amazed.

The women and the disciples did all three Rs: they remembered what Jesus said and understood it in a new way. They returned to tell people who also would remember. And they rejoiced together.

We are in much the same predicament as the disciples. People have remembered what Jesus said, over many centuries. The women, the disciples, the gospel writers, have all told us what they saw and what they remembered. On our good days, we remember what Jesus has taught us, what Jesus showed us, how Jesus lived and died and rose again.

Disciples have returned to us in the words of Scripture, to tell us that they remembered and understood Jesus's words in a fuller way after that Easter

morning. We too need to return to share what we have remembered. Where do we return? To the people who know us best, to our communities, to the places and people we call home. That's where the disciples went first. Later, strengthened in numbers, they went away from home and community, to tell what they had remembered. But first they returned to be encouraged and remember together.

And the disciples rejoiced together. I have to think they were giddy in their relief that what Jesus had told them was true, that the empty tomb meant he really had been resurrected. We rejoice together each week in worship at this same news. We may not feel it particularly strongly every single week, but we gather to rejoice and worship and celebrate together.

The remembering and returning and rejoicing all go together. Each would be incomplete without the others, and they are intertwined together in a way that makes them hard to separate.

We have the renewed opportunity to believe the women at the empty tomb, to remember ourselves what Jesus said and did and called us to do. We have the renewed opportunity to return to share that with our communities and neighbors and families and friends. And we have the renewed opportunity to rejoice together, this day of resurrection and each day. Let's remember, and return, and rejoice on this joyful Easter day.