

Recognizing the Holy (Easter)

Luke 24:1-12

April 17, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

What the women were doing that morning after the Sabbath was not unusual. It was familiar to them. Luke names three of them, and then says there were others, so at least five women, maybe more, were going to the tomb in order to prepare Jesus's body for burial, since there hadn't been time before the Sabbath to do so. This was ordinary women's work.

They had seen exactly where Joseph of Arimathea had put the body, in a brand new tomb. They knew exactly where they were going. I'm sure they were a bit numb with the grief and trauma of the past few days, their brains not thinking quickly or clearly. They had witnessed the crucifixion, they had stayed till the bitter end, and now they were returning to the small comfort of the practical and the familiar and the ordinary.

In its way, going to the tomb could be a comfort. The Greek word for tomb is the same root word as "memory," so a tomb was a memory place, a sign of remembrance, a place to go in order to remember. Our cemeteries aren't that different, and our funeral customs are different but serve a similar purpose.

We go to cemeteries, we gather for funerals, in order to remember. We tend to the good memories and try to set the not-so-good memories aside. We remember not only our loved ones, but we remember the promise of resurrection and new life, a new heavens and a new earth that Isaiah describes.

A few months ago, some friends of mine put a Little Free Library in their front yard. Have you ever seen these? They're just small boxes—theirs looks like a newspaper box—that holds books for borrowing. No paperwork, no library card, no monitoring. If you have a book to donate, put it in the box. If there's one you want to read, take it out of the box. A simple concept, really. They're all over the country--these friends live in Pennsylvania.

On their Little Free Library is a small engraved sign. "In memory of our brothers," it says. Below that, it gives the names and dates of their brothers' lives, just like a gravestone. One was 43 when he died; the other 31. One is buried in Arizona; the other in Arkansas. They obviously can't visit the cemeteries very often in order to remember, so they put up this Little Free Library in their memory and honor.

Every week, a man stops by. He drives in a silver car, parks at the curb.

Sometimes he takes a book out, sometimes he puts a book in. But every time, he reaches out and touches the small engraved sign, makes the sign of the cross, and prays. Then he gets back in the car and drives away. They don't know who he is or why he does this, exactly. Maybe he stops and remembers his own brother. Whoever he is, he has recognized the holiness of this place, and he honors the memories it holds.

The women undoubtedly recognized the holiness of the tomb, the memory place. They honored the memories it held. But that isn't where the story ends. When they go to recognize the holiness and honor the memories and perform the rituals and customs of their people, instead of a body, they find an empty tomb. They don't immediately erupt into "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" and Alleluias. They're perplexed. A bit worried. Confused. Not all the way to curious yet, because they are still weighed down and sluggish with grief.

They don't have time to be perplexed for long, because two angels appear and ask this question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Well, the answer is obvious. They aren't looking for the living. Indeed, why *would* anyone go to a cemetery to look for someone who is still alive?

Then the angels say: "Remember." Remember what he told you. Remember that he said he would rise again on the third day. The tomb is a memory place, a remembering place. It's not just a place for remembering their grief over the death of Jesus. It becomes, quickly, a place for remembering the promises of new and eternal life. And in their remembering, those promises become real and fulfilled. The women believe, as they remember.

Interestingly, Easter morning brings no appearance of the resurrected Jesus, in Luke's story. He doesn't appear until Easter evening, on the road to Emmaus. The remembering is sufficient, at least for the women, and at least for a while. They go to tell the men, but no one except Peter believes them. He captures some sense of what they have experienced that morning, for he, too, goes to the tomb, to the remembering place, and is amazed once he recognizes the holiness that is the empty tomb.

An empty tomb, a tiny library, a cemetery. We recognize the holiness of so many places. In holy places, we remember. We have grieved, and are grieving, so much. Our memories are precious and bring us comfort, and they are holy. We remember the people and things and experiences we once had but now do not.

But the holiness of the empty tomb and the messengers that await us there, call us to do more than remember what we are missing. They call us to remember what Jesus has promised us. Jesus has promised us hope and light and

life. Jesus has promised us that grieving and memories are not the end. Jesus has promised us that all of those endings we think we see are really beginnings, new beginnings, in him. Jesus has promised us that death does not have the last word, that our lost hopes are not lost forever, that new life, eternal life, something altogether different and altogether filled with love and grace and holiness, awaits us. We remember all of those promises, and we recognize the holy, and we remember how much God loves us, and the grace of God's gift to us, made known in Jesus Christ. Alleluia. Amen.