

An Idle Tale?
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Isaiah 65:17-25

¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Luke 24:1-12

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you,

while he was still in Galilee,⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’⁸ Then they remembered his words,⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

One of the most important things to remember when reading the Bible is that no one part can be read without considering how the rest of the Bible informs the reading. The Bible is not merely composed of small stories but is one big story of God in relationship to creation, including each of us. Each reading, whether today or five months ago or four years from now, says something about how God is being and what God is doing. Today’s readings are no exception.

Our reading from Isaiah involves God’s promises of no more weeping or cries of distress, no more infants dying and all living long years. The reading promises houses and vineyards of one’s own. The reading promises no more labors in vain or children born into a world without hope. The reading from Isaiah was addressed to the people of Israel, and spoken for the Hebrew people who are our ancestors in faith, for a people who had just been slaves in Babylon, for a people who knew weeping and cries of distress, who knew infants dying and short lives, who knew labor for the benefit of others instead of themselves, and who knew a world with a hopeless future. Such promises of misfortune undone, of hopes fulfilled, of gain instead of loss rang with a tone of “too good to be true.” These, these acts, these gifts, were surely beyond what God would do for them, not beyond what God could do but beyond what God would do, they believed, since they believed they had been sent into exile by God for their disobedience.

In a similar way, the story told by the women who went to the tomb seemed too good to be true. God could raise Jesus from the dead but why would God do such a thing? After all, God took the prophet Elijah up to heaven without him needing to die;¹ certainly God could take the body of Jesus to heaven as well. But the men in dazzling white, who we understand to be God’s messengers, did not say that Jesus’ body was gone. They said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” God had raised him from the dead and back to life. And this is the story the women brought back with them: an innocent man’s death, somehow undone; a hope fulfilled that death could not hold their friend and teacher; a gain, whose fullness they had yet to comprehend, in place of the loss they were feeling. What the women said was not possible or logical or imaginable, an idle tale - the Greek suggests “the ranting

¹ 2 Kings 2

of a person suffering from delirium.”² The world as we know it does not work like that. Such a story is certainly beyond our wildest dreams. How could this be, the disciples wondered.

These same women who told these ranting and delirious tales, however, are also found earlier in the gospel of Luke.³ We read, “Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.”⁴ Of all people, these women were the *least* likely to be speaking deliriously, having been rid of their demons by Christ himself, and even still the eleven did not know how to believe them and so dismissed them, at least at first. We’re sitting here today so we know they must have come around and begun spreading the word eventually.

However, difficulty grasping the resurrection remains today. In this day many consider the whole of Christianity an idle tale, a tale we tell ourselves to bring us comfort, Karl Marx’s “opium of the people.”⁵ Have *you* considered the strangeness of what we believe? We believe a being far greater than us, whom we call God, created each of us and everything around us. We believe that same God is still present among us in a way which we describe as Spirit. We believe that, seeing that we were missing the point of creation – love one another as I have loved you - and getting further from the point, that same God came in our shoes, in our skin, so that we might “get it.” Part of helping us “get it” involved dying, being killed by the very same created ones for whom he came, to show us that our horrible actions against one another do not win, do not have the last word. Instead, our creator’s love for us has the final say; in God’s order, bad does not triumph, nor does death.

Why do we believe any of this? Some might say because of beauty beyond our imagination, others because of kindness beyond that which we believe ourselves capable, or because of solidarity that involves no personal gain. Surely these are but some of the evidences of the touch of a loving being far greater than us. Still others have a story, or a few, where God so clearly touched a moment or guided a path that they were so humbled that there was nothing else to be done but give God credit. Today begins with the women’s recounting of resurrection. And today is a day for us to share our own witnessing of resurrection, our own evidences of love having the final say, and to share the stories of those we know and even those we’ve only read or heard. Who among us does not know someone who has a story which begins “You may not believe this…” or “I don’t know how else to explain this…”?

² *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2*, p. 351.

³ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2*, p. 349.

⁴ Luke 8:1-3

⁵ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

Who cannot tell a tale of something that once seemed bad developing into a better outcome than hoped for or expected? New life where only death was believed.

Resurrection was not separate from Jesus' life but part of it. New life was, and is, another facet to the same gem. Resurrection was not an exception to all the persecution and frustration and pain of life but a bright piece woven into the very fabric of Jesus' life. In the same way, resurrection is not an exception or something that comes "after" for us, those in whose form he came, either. Our annual celebration of Easter is one way in which we affirm that there is not only one resurrection in our lives, but many. Our opportunities for new life are many, limited only by our own willingness to take the opportunities. Each time we love our neighbors, rather than pretend them invisible or even treat them with hostility, there is new life. It really comes down to that. We can keep missing the point of creation, or we can "get it," we can share with Jesus in showing that our horrible actions against one another do not win, do not have the last word. We can share our creator's love for us with others, giving love the final say and causing good to triumph.

Even if you don't understand how God created us, how the Spirit moves among us, how Jesus could come and die so we might live (and who really does *understand* such things), we have faith that they are true and we come here today to proclaim that faith. Even Jesus coming in our shoes was not enough for us to fully get it, certainly not all the time, so we come here and we come together for reminders, for support, to affirm that love wins. In the midst of chaos, devastation, grief, we come here and we come together to remind others and to be reminded that resurrection **is** occurring.

The scriptures during the season of Lent have been encouraging us to turn closer to God – not because God needs it but because we do. God tells us through the book of Revelation, "See, I making all things new"⁶ because we need to hear it again, and again, and again. We tell the Easter story again and again because, see, God is making all things new, over and over. We tell the Easter story again and again because we can't fully understand it but we have faith that each retelling brings us a little closer to a humble comprehension of why God lived and died and was raised for us through Jesus. We tell the Easter story again and again because, while it may seem an idle tale to some, even us at times, we hope to come around as the disciples did that we, too, might spread the good news. We tell our own resurrection stories, the ways in which we have witnessed God making things new, and we tell them again and again that we, too, might spread the good news so that someone might hear and go running off like Peter to seek the truth for themselves.

It may seem too good to be true but what God can do is what God will do – in the end, love wins; in the end, Christ is risen, again and again. He is risen, indeed!

⁶ Revelation 21:5

Let us pray: Open our hearts, O God, that we might receive the new life which has come at such a cost and that we might not miss the opportunities to be examples that your love wins, we pray. Amen.