

**All You Need to Know—Luke 24: 1-12**  
*Easter Sunday April 17, 2022*

One of the challenges of being a preacher in a liberal Christian Church is you spend so much time trying to explain the unexplainable (healings, miracles, resurrection) that you only have a little time left to get to the heart of the message—how we live out this improbable faith. I'm pondering that challenge this week when seemingly out of nowhere the lyrics to a classic love song from the eighties pops into my head. You might know it, it's "Don't Know Much" by Aaron Neville and Linda Ronstadt. The line goes, "I don't know much, but I know I love you, that maybe all I need to know." It probably pops into my head because when it comes to the events of that Easter morning long ago, I really don't know much. I can't stand here and tell you what happened.

When it comes to explanations, I am inclined to believe people like the late American Episcopal Bishop and author John Shelby Spong. In the resurrection stories Spong sees communities of Jesus followers, whose lives are transformed, and they try to understand how it all happens. How to explain the events following Jesus' death. Events of such startling and enormous power that they bring together and re-energize a scattered and demoralized band of disciples. Events so profound that they turn a denying Peter into a martyr for his beliefs and disciples who abandon Jesus into heroes willing to die for their Lord. Events so life changing that Jews raised to believe that God alone was holy and worthy of worship could no longer conceive of God apart from Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup> How did all that flow from a brutal state and religious execution? How could the Gospel writers explain the experience of Jesus as risen Lord, the breaker of the barrier of death, the living, empowering presence in the life of those early Christian communities? They turn to story, story rooted in the prophecies of their scriptures and resplendent in astonishing acts worthy of the miraculous transformations they witness in the early communities of Jesus followers.

That's a fine explanation as it goes, it satisfies my intellectual curiosity, and it doesn't ask me to leave my brain at the church door. But explanations have a way of closing things off—you get it sorted out in your head and you move on. You kind of become the master over the story. The great mistake of liberal Christianity is to be content with intellectual explanations. The great mistake of orthodox Christianity has been to harden these stories of faith into static beliefs and dogmas wherein the story as written on the page becomes the explanation. Our resurrection story isn't interested in explaining anything. It wants to pull us in. For life's deepest mysteries and most profound truths words are best used not to explain, but to draw us in, invite us into an experience, invite us into a mystery.

Spring certainly helps us live into the resurrection experience. American Quaker, educator, author, and activist Parker Palmer says this about spring, "Spring begins tentatively, but it advances with a tenacity that never fails to touch me. The smallest and

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<sup>1</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*.

most tender shoots insist on having their way, pressing up through ground that looked, only a few weeks earlier, as if it would never grow anything again.”<sup>2</sup> Spring helps us to view life through resurrection eyes.

But do we dare look to the arena of human activity for resurrection. I do so with some fear and trepidation; as we confront the horrors in Ukraine and Yemen, the increase in fascist sentiment worldwide, terrible inequities in dealing with a global pandemic, the discovery of children’s graves at residential schools, impending climate disaster. I want to avoid using the Easter story and the resurrection of Jesus in a glib, trite, and facile way in the face of these realities. The pain in our world is deep and there is no divine intervention to stop it. That’s truth.

But there are other truths if we look deeper. For years I have contemplated what to me is a profound if unglamorous symbol of Easter. You see it driving the Conestoga expressway or the 401. Up against the concrete median barriers you’ll see a small mound of dirt that has accumulated, blown there by the wind. Rising from that mound will be a shoot of green, sometimes flowering. It never fails to warm my heart and fill me with hope. Life doesn’t need much; life insists on being. Resurrection is at the heart of the universe. Death—human caused death like the crucifixion, not the death that is part of the natural cycle—requires a tremendous amount of effort and resources. Consider all the effort and money that goes into a war. Consider the communication and misinformation strategies that manipulate us into demonizing others as the solution to our problems, consider the people and financial resources that went into the residential school system, consider the vast lobbying resources and legal obstacles that keep vaccine formulas from being shared and thus made affordable for all. It can make you depressed, there’s no doubting that. The amount of effort and resources we put into crucifixion and death can make you despair for humanity and that makes sense. But don’t let it make you despair for God.

Friends, we only need to get out of God’s way. The vitality and contributions of Indigenous young people in Canada in the aftermath of residential schools is a startling example of this. People like Autumn Peltier, Ojibway/Odawa from Wikwemikong First Nation in Ontario a world renown water activist. People like Jay Odjick, Algonquin Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, in Quebec, artist and graphic novelist who uses his talents and social media savvy to promote his language. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, Inuit in Nunavut who became an MP at the age of 25 and is a fierce mental health and housing advocate. Life, resurrection doesn’t need much. Life insists on being.<sup>3</sup>

Crucifixion should have been the end of the line for the disciples, for Jesus and his message. All the political and religious forces in the land were aligned against them. Yet amid such hostile conditions these disciples were emboldened and empowered to form communities based on the love shown them in Jesus. Communities where widows and

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<sup>2</sup> Parker Palmer, <https://onbeing.org/blog/spring-is-mud-and-miracle/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/i-am-indigenous-2017/>

orphans were cared for, where slaves and slave masters came together as equals, where women shared leadership, where men got the support to refuse to fight in Roman wars. The experience of the gospel writers is that a weapon of torture and execution, the cross, became a symbol of hope and love. Death is real, but life insists on being.

This Easter Sunday we don't need to know much, we don't need to know what happened or didn't happen two millennia ago. We just need to know that we are loved, grace abounds. Just let yourself be pulled into the story, a story where God is in charge, where we are invited to participate in the never –ending dance of death and life, death, and life. Look to the world with resurrection eyes, let go of the folly of control, look for what God is doing, roll aside the stone to the tomb, let God out and allow her to have her way with you. Christ is risen, that's all you need to know, thanks be to God.