

Powerful Nonsense (Luke 24-12)
Pastor Hubert den Draak, Easter 2016

Did someone ever tell you a tall tale that you just *knew* can't be true - only to find out that it's true, after all? I remember when Jacomyn and I were about to move from "the centre of the universe" (that would be Toronto) to NW Ontario, friends told us you had to watch out for actual, live moose crossing the road. And that it was so cold up there, that instead of rock climbing, people would go *ice* climbing! Yeah, right, we thought; nice try. But then we got here, and guess what... those "tall tales" are part of every-day life here. It was true! Unbelievable...

Almost 2000 years ago, a group of friends who had been followers of a travelling teacher and rabbi went into hiding because their teacher had been executed for suspicion of crimes against the state. They knew that they would probably be next. But then, on the third day, some of the women who were also part of their group, told them a tale so unbelievable, so fantastic, that it simply couldn't be true.



The tale was that Jesus their teacher and friend, the one who had died in agony on the cross, was actually alive. It was impossible, nonsense! It must have been their imagination. It was just wishful thinking on their part, wasn't it. They even claimed to have encountered angels! Poor delusional women, their grief was too great for them to accept reality. Right...?

Luke says that when the men heard what the women had to tell, they thought it was

"nonsense". Of course they would; this didn't make *any* sense from their point of view!

There was *no* way that the same teacher who had hurriedly been buried before the Passover, was no longer in the tomb. It was not just that it was too good to be true (even though they had wished it were); it was that it was impossible. So many people had seen him die. The Roman methods of crucifixion were very effective and very final. Some of them in that group had placed his battered, beaten and lifeless body with their own hands in the borrowed tomb.

They knew what they knew - and what they knew was that Jesus was dead. What they also knew was that the hopes they had held onto for three years had died with him. Apparently, Jesus was no more than another idealistic dreamer who talked about love and the transforming power of God.

What they knew was that they had to face facts. As much as it hurt, they had to forget about this idealistic dreamer from Nazareth. They had to get on with their lives, go back to work and be more realistic about their hopes and dreams in the future. That's what they knew.

Yet, so soon after the terrible events of Friday, there was still a part of them that really wanted to believe that they had *not* wasted three years of their lives. There was part of them that wanted this fantastic tale to be true. They desperately wanted to believe that Jesus was *not* like anyone else, that he was different.

So, I suppose Peter went to keep the women happy - and to satisfy his curiosity, his nagging wish that it could be true. What he found, or rather, what he did *not* find, was the beginning of an experience that would change his life forever.

Now remember that in all of this that it was not just the *absence* of Jesus from the tomb that ultimately changed their lives and convinced them that Jesus had been raised. No, it was his undeniable *presence* in their lives that changed them forever and gave them new purpose.

Remember that the Easter proclamation is not just "he is not here", but "he is risen". The Easter proclamation is not just "he *was* raised" but "he *IS* risen!" Present tense.

Like the first disciples, we don't need any reminders of the Kingdom of death. We don't need to be reminded of this, for we may live it each and every day. Our family may have more than its fair share of sorrow, illness and pain. We don't need to be reminded of tragedies and disappointments. We don't need to be reminded that life can a bleak struggle for some.

And even if your own life is no struggle, you need only to turn on the evening news or pick up a newspaper to see graphic images of millions of refugees displaced by war and violence; terrorist attacks on innocent people in Paris, and now Brussels. And dangerous people like Donald Trump who use people's fears, hate and bigotry to increase their own power.

What we so need to be told, and often need to be told it OVER AND OVER again, is that there is life in the midst of death, hope in the midst of despair, love in the midst of hate. But that's only the beginning; we need to do more than this. We also need to open our lives to the presence of the One whom the tomb could not hold, the one who lives.

And that means we need to tell the story - no: we need to *proclaim* the story. Despite the despair that we may feel, despite the way the world seems, the powers of evil and death have indeed been defeated. Christ *is* risen. That is not a past tense statement. That is present tense. Right here. Right now. Christ - is - risen.

What we see now is evil trying to do as much damage as it can before it has to give up, because it knows it has been defeated. It won't make the evening news and you

have to know where to look, but God's Kingdom pop up everywhere, it cannot be stopped. So let's join it, let's give it a chance to grow!

We are called to practice the resurrection. We need to put our money and our time and our lives where our mouths are. We need to perform "resurrection actions", if only to show ourselves that the Kingdom of Life and Love is stronger than the Kingdom of death and hatred.

We need to place our trust in the One who was raised, despite the evidence to the contrary - evidence that often seems to contradict this fundamental proclamation of the gospel.

Because it's not about what the world believes, it's about what we believe and what we are prepared to live for. *Do we believe that Christ is raised?*

If we do, then we are called to proclaim it - and to live it out. Live it out by refusing to return hatred with hatred - but with love. By responding to violence not with fear, but with faith in the way of Christ. By responding not with revenge, but with grace and dialogue.

Others may ridicule us and dismiss our faith as "nonsense". But you know what? That's not important; this is who we are and what we're about: followers of the Way of the Cross - and new life in Christ.

Christ is risen. And with the generations who have gone before we can and will proclaim HE IS RISEN INDEED! Hallelujah - amen!