

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, March 31, 2024

“Wandering Heart: And I Hope”

The Message

For those of you who have not been able to join us through Lent, we have wandering with Peter on this Lenten journey.

We have watched as Jesus called Peter to be a disciple by climbing into Peter's fishing boat and taking it out on the water so he could teach the people on shore.

We watched as, after a long night of fishing without success, Jesus tells Peter and his crew to go back out, and with heavy hearts, they try again.

Then, we watched as Peter's crew hauled in nets overflowing in abundance of fish. Through this experience, we saw Peter drop his livelihood and begin his discipleship with Jesus.

Next, we journeyed with Peter as he tried to step out of the boat and onto the water and walk toward Jesus.

Through a tremendous leap of faith, Peter took a risk and stepped out of the boat, and began to sink.

But we also saw Peter try something daring in order to demonstrate his faith in Jesus, knowing that even if he failed, Jesus would extend his hand to him.

We've wandered with Peter as he's confronted his biases about what a Messiah might say and do.

We've seen him ask so many questions, we've seen him doubt Jesus, and we've seen him deny Jesus.

Peter is the rock on which the church is built.

But he's also imperfect and flawed – anxious and unsure, questioning and doubting.

And today – on Easter Sunday – we might expect that, after denying Christ, Peter would cower in shame.

We might expect him to run away and leave this wild journey with Jesus behind him.

Instead, when he hears the news that the tomb is empty from this group of women, he doesn't dismiss them like the other disciples do.

He gets up and he runs to the tomb.

When he peers into the empty tomb and he sees the linen cloth, he is filled with awe.

I wonder if, as he ran to the tomb, he was feeling disbelief, or hope?

Was he wondering if it was truly possible that Jesus rose from the dead?

Peter had denied Christ three times. He was not there when Jesus died.

So when a group of women come to the disciples telling them the tomb is empty, the others don't respond with simple disbelief – they outright dismiss the women.

While translations will render their reaction as “an idle tale,” “foolish talk,” or “nonsense,” the real meaning of the Greek word is “garbage.” The women announce Jesus' promises fulfilled and the response—from the ones who were closest to Jesus— is, “yeah, well, that's a bunch of rubbish.”

There is so much truth and honesty in this reaction.

After all, the good news frequently seems too good to be true.

If the tomb is empty, if Jesus has been raised from the dead, then life as we've known and expected it is no longer.

The world has been turned upside down (Acts 17:6).

And if the world has been turned upside down, how do we even know how to live?

If the disciples thought the resurrection was a pile of trash, what are people going to think when we confess belief in the resurrection?

“Could it really be true?” is the question I think Peter asked himself, and with hope on his heels, he ran to the tomb to see for himself.

Peter goes home wondering and it's in that wondering that the meaning of the resurrection lies.

The resurrection only makes sense when we remain amazed, marveling and wondering at the love of God that reversed death itself.

We are not asked to explain the resurrection, offer proof for the resurrection, or make a case for the resurrection.

Instead, like Peter, we live in wonder—for how belief in the God of resurrection truly can change the world, making it a more beautiful place.

A place where asking questions, remaining awed, and maintaining a sense of wonder are important and healthy ways of being in the world. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of new beginnings, On that first Easter morning, the disciples struggled to hear the good news. Doubt clouded their minds. Negativity took root and hope vanished with a simple shake of their heads. Thank you for helping us to hear differently this morning. Thank you for opening our ears that we might hear the sound of Alleluias ringing through our hearts.

Thank you for opening our minds so that the mystery and joy of Easter might feel within reach. Thank you for opening our hearts so that we might believe the unbelievable. And, thank you for helping us move closer to you today and every day. Amen.

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