

Easter – Luke 24:1-12

So the two messengers dressed in white asked an important question of the women...why do you look for the living among the dead?

The short answer of course is that they weren't. They were looking for the dead among the dead. It's where you would expect to find someone you'd seen brutally executed just a couple days ago. They knew what death looked like, and they'd seen it.

We know death. We know what it looks like, what it smells like. We know what it feels like when someone we love dies.

Do we know where to look for life?

This year, I was all over the Maundy Thursday story about Jesus' last meal with his disciples. I loved the Good Friday service with its powerful rendering of the passion story in word and song.

Then there's that Saturday between death and resurrection. Often called Holy Saturday, or silent Saturday, for us it's a day of waiting...waiting for Easter. For a lot of us, it probably wasn't much different than any other Saturday. I suspect we don't really appreciate what that Saturday must have been like for Jesus' followers.

As I was writing this on Holy Saturday, it seemed to me like we've been living in Holy Saturday for over a year.

Holy Saturday is what we would call a liminal space. A liminal space is a crossover space. It's a space or time in which you've left something behind, but you haven't fully arrived at whatever is next.

For the disciples, both the men and the women, Saturday was a day of profound grief. What they'd known about Jesus and what they thought should happen was behind them, lying cold in a borrowed tomb. At that point they have no idea what's next.

The events leading up to Jesus' death have left them shattered, afraid, uncertain. That Saturday must have been awful.

But...that's how today's reading begins...but.

That little word changed everything for all the disciples, women and men. It's where everything that went before changed in to after...after the resurrection.

I'll have to admit, I'm still a bit stuck in more the Good Friday – Holy Saturday mode. This year has taken its toll.

I've just become aware in the last few weeks or so how weary I am of all the things that have made up this past year.

The constant effort to figure out how best to be church in a way that was safe for not just our community, but the broader community has been exhausting. Everything seems harder.

The first Lent under the pandemic had a sense of novelty and trying new things, even though some of them...Zoom I see you...could be both tremendous blessing and immensely frustrating.

But a second pandemic Lent and Holy Week has just been a slog.

The vaccine is offering considerable hope that the pandemic will end, so that's good. But it's not clear yet whether enough folks are planning to receive it to truly end it.

It seems like lately the flag in our front yard has flown at half mast more often than full mast. Daryl has lowered it for pandemic victims, shooting victims, and now a slain Capitol police officer.

Social media has become kind of a cesspool of meanness. It's hard to see a way through the divisions and rancor of the past actually several years. I'm thinking maybe the best resurrection activity I can come up with is to get off social media for awhile.

I can make an endless litany of things that just aren't the way I want them to be...or that really anyone wants them to be. I know I'm not alone in this. Most of us are a bit weary with all that's gone on. And for some, actual clinical depression and anxiety disorders have cropped up. Mental health practitioners have been busy.

It all left me tired and struggling to come up with a hopeful Easter sermon.

But then someone on a preaching Facebook page I follow pointed out the importance of that word "but."

As the sun set on that miserable first Holy Saturday, the Sabbath came to an end. The disciples may have decided to try to get some sleep. They didn't know what they would do next. Exhausted by the events of the week...still processing the horror and shock of Jesus' death...they had no idea.

The women disciples went to bed with all their spices and ointments ready for the task awaiting them in the morning. When the sun was just coming up, they would take them and head to Jesus' tomb. That's what you did when a loved one died. So in the morning, they made a quiet, heartbroken trek to the cemetery to anoint his body. It should have been done before his burial, but there was no time that day.

They expected to go to the tomb, roll the stone away, and go into the tomb to unwrap Jesus' body, anoint him and rewrap his body.

But...but at dawn that first day...something totally different happened.

Now, you will notice that by the end of our reading, it wasn't clear much had changed. The women believed that Jesus had risen but there's not much indication they knew what to do with that information.

The men, hearing the story secondhand, didn't even believe it had happened.

But...we know now that things had changed. A cosmic shift in the universe changed everything we thought about death. If the dead could come to life, what else can happen?

So, if you're like me and a little stuck more in Good Friday or Holy Saturday mode, thinking everything is just a big weight, hang on to your seat...and hang on to that but, because God is changing things up.

We might be mainly tired and uncertain about what's next...we may be impatient and frustrated with how long this has been. Some are grieving today...not just deaths from Covid but all the other things that bring our earthly life to an end. Other unhappy life events have sent some into a tailspin of doubt and sorrow. Death...big death and all the little deaths along the way weigh heavily.

But...But Christ is risen. And that means God has come down decisively for life.

If nothing else, that but teaches us to look for life instead of death.

Because of Jesus, resurrection has broken in to our lives. Wherever we expect to see death, God is working to bring life.

We may be weary and sad...but...because Christ is risen, hope's head is peaking up over the horizon.

We may be struggling with our own wounds and brokenness, but...because Christ is risen, healing and new life are ours.

And we may fear death...but...because Christ is risen we know death has been defeated.