

C Easter festival, Narrative 32
April 16, 2017
Poulsbo
Pastor Alison Shane

Luke 24:1-12

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from God our father, and the risen Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

This might be my favorite Easter account of the four gospel-writers. This one has sassy angels (“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”), women who hold their own even through the mansplaining (“these words seemed to [the disciples] an idle tale, and they did not believe them”), this disbelief, even though the women were reminding them what JESUS HIMSELF had told the disciples THREE TIMES before he died. Luke’s account has great characters!

But truthfully, no matter who tells it, the story of Easter is a scary story. We don’t usually think of it that way. The story of Jesus’ death and resurrection is one of great joy and hope for us and great love on the part of God. But if you listen to what God is up to, it is a scary story.

This is a story of God on the loose in the world.

On Friday, as we were listening to Luke’s account of the happenings leading to the death of Jesus, we heard that the temple curtain was torn in two. This half a sentence carries incredible significance. The temple curtain was a thick, woven fabric, a square 15ft by 15ft, separating the two chambers of the Tabernacle. The first chamber was called the Holy Place, it contained the Table, Lampstand, and Altar of Incense. Only priests were allowed into this section. The second chamber, behind the curtain, called the Holy of Holies, contained the Ark of the Covenant. Only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

This veil reminded priest and people alike that God’s presence was too holy for human’s sinful presence. It kept God safe from the contamination of our sinfulness, and it kept people safe from the presence of God. This is where the creators of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* got the images for the scene where the Nazis opened the ark and everybody died. They weren’t supposed to go behind the veil; it was dangerous. So when Jesus died and the temple curtain was torn in two, it was obviously done by God, because no human could have torn that curtain, and it meant two things. It meant that God was inviting humans into the presence of God without fear. AND it meant that God was invading the realm of humans. God was on the loose in the world.

Fast forward to Sunday, and the women arrive at the tomb to find the stone rolled away and the tomb itself missing its occupant. (Seriously, tomb, you had one job!) Can you just picture it, though? The women slowly entering the tomb, trying to make sense of the empty scene before them, slowly turning around to face the entrance (or exit), because anyone who knows anything about thrillers knows that a missing body is bad news for the ones who discover it.

Jesus was on the loose. Jesus was dead. Jesus was then no longer dead. Jesus walked out of the tomb. Jesus was on the loose. God has a nasty habit of not staying where we put him.

We put God in happy places. We like to see God in things that go our way. We like to see God in karma. We like to see God in that empty parking space right in front of the store we’re going to. But the truth is, God works in icky places. Our God of life, God of resurrection, seeks

out places of death, because that's where resurrection is needed. God works in places we don't want to be, God works *with* people we don't want to be around, God works *for* people we don't think deserve it, and God works in *ways* we don't think are appropriate.

But the message of these three days is that God is on the loose in the world. And God is out there doing whatever God pleases. And it pleases God to do crazy things. Luke warned us of God's crazy acts from the very beginning. We heard that God in Jesus would show strength with his arm and scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God in Jesus would bring down the powerful from their thrones, and lift up the lowly. God in Jesus would fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty. Which seem like good things, until you realize that we could easily be counted among the proud, the powerful, the rich.

God is at loose in the world, changing the way things work, upsetting the status quo, upending the very things that have worked out very well for us so far.

And yet we still see Jesus' resurrection as good news, even for us. We still show up here, not in fear of judgment, but in joy and hope. Because this dangerous God, this God who breaks out of our boxes and defies our expectations, this God at loose in the world is still good news.

God at loose in the world, means that it's not up to us. It's not up to us to save ourselves, it's not left to us to make the world a better place on our own, it's not just on us to make justice a reality in this world. God is at loose in the world, working alongside us, working in us. Making a kingdom in the here and now.

And THAT is why we come here. We come here to be reminded that God has done the heavy lifting for us, we are now called to do God's work, and that God is with us in the world doing that work.

We come here, because here God gives us forgiveness in the bread and wine that is Jesus' body and blood. We come here, because here we find God supporting us among and through God's people. We come here, because here we encounter the love of God from those who have heard Jesus' Maundy Thursday call to serve. We come here, because here God reminds us of our mission and purpose for the week: to demonstrate the love of Christ to all people.

Temple curtain torn in two, empty tomb, God on the loose in the world – all mean that God is with you. All day, every day. Because God loves you enough to tear the curtain, break down all the walls, destroy even death – to get to you.

Amen