

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 24:1-12
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
March 31, 2013

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

I was looking out the window of my house last week. It was just starting to get dark. All of a sudden, a little bunny hopped out from under our tool shed. He lives under there but only comes out after dark. Then another bunny hopped out from under a lumber pile on the other side of our yard. I hadn't seen the second bunny in our yard before. "**I bet that bunny lives under that pile.**" The two bunnies then both started hopping toward our bird feeder in the center of the yard. When they saw each other, the one ran back under the lumber pile and stayed there.

Both of those bunnies were surely hungry. All that they might ever find under my birdfeeder would be a few seeds scattered there by the birds feeding up above. And even those fallen seeds are probably pretty much eaten up by the squirrels during the daylight hours. The next morning I saw one of the bunnies out looking for food in the daylight. They never do that for fear of the hawk. "**There is a lot of snow on the ground,**" I thought. "**Those rabbits must be having a very hard time finding enough food. I bet that they are very hungry. I should help them somehow...**" That's when I went and looked in our refrigerator. "**Oh, there's a little bowl of leftover corn. I can put that out for them.**" I dumped the bowl out on the top of the snow bank outside our back door.

Guess what? The next morning the corn was all gone and there were bunny tracks everywhere. That corn was probably a wonderful surprise for them. It gave them at least a little chance to make it through our long, harsh winter until more food was available for them. The rabbits were just **hoping to find dry seeds** and instead they **found wonderful corn to eat.**

Kids, it is Easter. On **Good Friday** Jesus died on the cross. All of his friends were so sad, afraid and hopeless. Their world was just going to be as hard as ever without Jesus to help them. They gave up. Then on **Easter morning**, they discovered that Jesus wasn't dead

anymore. Jesus came back and promised them that he would never leave his people alone, or let them go. Jesus promised them that no matter how tough life might get, he would always be there to love and take care of them. Jesus' friends got a **wonderful surprise from God**. There's nothing, even death, which can take us away from Jesus. **God's surprise is for us too kids**. Jesus is **alive, loves us and will keep us safely in God's care – not just for a day, but forever**. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

I can remember when I was a kid. Our teacher or parents would ask us kids to do something and a chorus of complaints would break out. We had all kinds of reasons why we shouldn't be doing whatever was asked of us. Or we didn't believe what we were being told. After not very long, our teacher or parent would say, "**Alright, I'll have no more ifs, ands or buts out of you!**" That was supposedly the end of the story, no more arguing.

But we live in an "**ifs, ands or buts world**." There is so much **uncertainty** in our world. There is so little that we dare to **count on** with all of the natural disasters, accidents, vicious killings, wars... There is so little that we can all **agree upon**. They say that the only two things you can count on in our world are **death and taxes**. Little wonder then that the idea of Jesus rising from the dead encountered so much skepticism.

Jesus is no stranger to our "**ifs, ands or buts world**." On the third day after Jesus had been killed and buried, angels appeared at the now empty tomb and told a handful of women that **Jesus was alive again**. The twelve verses that report this account in our Gospel lesson have no less than **six "buts"** in them. (Show text slide please.)

- Jesus was dead "**BUT on the first day of the week**" they came to do the culturally proper thing to care for his dead body...
- "**BUT when they went in**" they didn't find his body...
- They were looking for a dead Jesus, "**BUT the men (angels) said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'**"
- "He is not here, **BUT** has risen."
- They remind the women that this is what **Jesus had promised** would happen. The women then go and tell the hiding men

about Jesus being alive, "BUT these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

- "BUT Peter got up and ran to the tomb... saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened."

These are Jesus' front line believers that we are talking about here. The disciples thought the women were telling an "idle tale." This Greek word has the root word "delirious" – crazy, nuts, utter nonsense. Even Peter's "amazed" attitude can mean "wondering, puzzled..." In all of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, there is not a single one where even his closest followers EXPECTED him to come back. None of them BELIEVED that it was true at first either.

They lived in a judgmental, brutal, frightening world. They had been longing for life, joy and peace. Jesus seemed to have those gifts to give. Then the One who claimed that he came from God Almighty was killed by the political and religious authorities and the very people he came to save. His followers' hopes and dreams had all been dashed. Death is all she wrote right? That's it. Give up... So why "Easter?" Its because God knows all about a world of butts...

Easter isn't about how much faith they had or we have. Easter is about how loving and faithful God is. Jesus rising from the dead didn't make any sense to them back then. If, today, it's not hard for you to believe that Jesus wins victory over death, then maybe you're really not giving the idea much thought. If the dead don't stay dead, what can you count on? Resurrection isn't just some little "plants grow in the spring" and "bunnies bring eggs full of new life." Jesus' resurrection changes everything about how the world seems to work. If Easter is true, then God is creating an entirely new reality where life is more powerful than death and where love is more enduring than tragedy. You've seen dead people. How can God bring them back to life with new bodies?

Easter is a time to give thanks to God for faith. Faith isn't certainty. Faith is a good mixture of doubt, questions and even downright uncertainty at times. Faith is not understanding the mystery of resurrection, but still being able to hope and believe that its true.

Why would you doubt Jesus' resurrection? Death and taxes right? You've never seen anyone resurrected right? What about the natural order of things? What about science? What happens to our world if Jesus didn't rise from the dead? ...

And what happens if Jesus did rise from the dead?

- Death doesn't have the last word.
- Love and life are stronger than fear and death.
- God has a future in store for us.
- We will see our loved ones again.
- Anything is possible with God.

Faith came slowly for those original followers of Jesus. **But** when it did come, it changed everything. They started telling the story and today we, two thousand years later, are once again hearing it. **"YES"** to resurrection means **"NO"** to the death and destruction that surrounds us. In place of the bad news that confronts us, we can claim that there is a sustaining power that brings life out of death and reconciliation out of conflict.

- When all seems lost, God throws in a "BUT pray about it."
- When we think that we are all alone, God throws in a "BUT I am here for you."
- When we think that death is the last word, God throws in a "BUT I will raise you from the dead to live with me forever."
- You say, "I'm not ready to trust you." **BUT** God says, "I'll wait."
- The world says, "You're not worth waiting for." **BUT** God says, "You're worth dying for to me."
- You say, "I'm too busy to communicate with you today." **BUT** God says, "I'll still speak to your heart."
- You say, "I don't have time to worship this week." **BUT** God says, "I have an eternity of time for you."

Jesus got killed for welcoming sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, people who were sick or unclean, women, children, foreigners, strangers, hungry, naked, in prison... So when Jesus rose, guess what, the welcome goes on. And there's room for me, and you, and anyone who wants to come along. The women counted for little or

nothing back then. Yet Jesus' birth and Jesus' resurrection are both relayed to the women first. Jesus says the kingdom of God is made up of little children. They counted less than women.

The disciples didn't expect him to rise. They didn't believe he had risen. And the next thing you knew, most of them had literally died telling the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. I guess they believed in the end...

- Those folks betrayed, denied and shouted crucify, **BUT Jesus died for them anyway.**
- They ran and hid, never expected his return, **BUT Jesus rose anyway.**
- They doubted, misunderstood and argued, **BUT Jesus said, "Trust and follow me anyway."** And they did...

Pastor Herb Brokering tells of a recent visit to former East Germany. He and a group of tourists made an unscheduled stop in a tiny village off the beaten path. An older woman riding past on her bicycle saw that they were strangers and stopped. They were the first Americans she had seen in her village since just after World War II. One of Pastor Brokering's friends said to this woman - who had lived under communism for over forty years - "**Christ is risen!**" The old woman immediately responded, "**You bet he is risen! And he lives in every nook and cranny of this village.**" I guess there is faith even where communism held sway.

When apartheid ended in South Africa and former torturers and oppressors were put on trial by the Black majority, Nelson Mandela led the new nation in saying, "**If only you confess, you can be forgiven and set free.**" I guess those persecuted, suffering people tried to follow Jesus when they could have wreaked vengeance instead.

Shortly after moving to a brand new home and community, **Bill and Mary Ann Bredeesen** encountered a diagnosis of deadly cancer in her body. They had just started attending this church and now, a few months later, are amazed at the compassionate and loving welcome and support that they have continued to receive to this very day. And how many others among us are standing shoulder to shoulder in the face of adversity this day? Did Christ rise from the dead? Is Jesus alive and well in our world?

In the mornings when I read the paper and again in the evening when I watch the news, I curl up snug and warm under my **mom's afghan**. It was the last afghan that she used before she died. It has her name written on a little label – Olga Pedersen. That afghan brings to me memories of Mom's love. Those memories inform my view of life and the world – **hopeful**. Mom loved and cared for me. I will see her again someday.

In the mornings, evenings, during the day and in the darkness of the night, I am embraced by the afghan of God's warmth, love, memories and promises. I am loved and cared for by God. I will see God face to face on the last day. I am set free to see **my life and world embraced by God's love and care right now** – right now... all of it... and forever... That has a huge impact on how I relate to you, to the gas station attendant, to the school teacher, to the stranger, to the enemy...

Some days I believe more than others... How about you? **ifs, and or buts** – Jesus knows all about them and comes to give us life anyway. **Like it or not, ready or not, believe it or not,** – Jesus is going to keep coming to find, feed and give life to you and to me and to all of the others who are fearful, doubtful, skeptical or just trying to believe and live like it's true. **Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!**
Thanks be to God! Amen.