

Sermon for Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019

“ Remember There Is More”

Easter Sunday
April 21, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of the risen Christ.

The worst has happened, their hope is dead and buried, but there is work to be done. So the women set out for the tomb in the early dawn. When they get there the stone is moved, the tomb is empty. They are confused and afraid. Then angels say to them, don't you remember? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that all of this was going to happen?

Don't you remember? Are you kidding? Remember what he told us? We've just been through hell. We watched as our teacher was tortured and killed. All our hopes for him, crushed. So, we're not exactly studying up on his teachings just now. Our minds keep reliving the horrible events from the last few days. That's about all we can handle right now, thank you very much. Don't you remember? Please.

The women have come to a place for memories, to the tomb. They've come to remember Jesus and to care for him. But at this point, all they can really remember is the trauma of the last few days. Any hopeful talk seems to them an idle tale, as it does for the apostles later.

That's how it is with us humans. Our brains are wired to pay attention to painful, fearful, negative experiences. Those are stored in our brain much more easily than positive ones. Apparently, our brains evolved this way to protect us. It was crucial for our early ancestors to remember the sound of a prowling tiger, less important to savor the bird song returning each spring. Yet, how this plays out now can be problematic as our painful memories have such power.

This week I read an AP story about the survivors of the Columbine attacks who are now parents themselves. Mornings have been brutal for a woman named Kacey, a survivor and mom of four. Dropping her kids off at school brings up all her trauma, all her pain, all her fear. You know stories like this - the aunt who can't drive past the scene of the accident, the vet that can't stand fireworks and won't talk about why. It's understandable that people get stuck in these moments.

How that plays out for us in more mundane circumstances can also be problematic. Even if twenty people compliment us on something we do, we tend to remember the one person who critiqued it. If we have a lovely day but one thing goes wrong, that will likely be what stands out in our memories of the day. We don't lay awake at night obsessing about all the smart things we did in, like, 3rd grade; but we do lay awake obsessing about the one dumb thing we did.

We get stuck in the negative. Brain researchers call it negativity bias. Fear and pain get stored in our minds and bodies. We get buried under the weight of all that is fearful, worrisome and sad. So,

no, of course, the women don't remember what Jesus said and did and all he taught them. All they can remember is the hard stuff. They are buried in their own tombs of grief and fear and anxiety.

But then, something changes for them. As they stand there in the light of a new day, in that open, empty tomb, near the stone that has been rolled away, as they hear astonishing good news from the angels - he is risen - things start to shake loose for them. They lift up their heads to look around, they begin to breathe a little more easily. Something greater than their trauma gets inserted into their mental loop and they DO start to remember more about Jesus ...

"You know, he did talk about dying and rising again." "And, he said what is impossible for mortals is possible for God." "Remember how he healed and forgave people, how he showed such compassion and welcome? It was like he brought life with him wherever he went." "He crossed boundaries, too - eating with sinners and tax collectors, inviting us women into his ministry. All the normal barriers didn't seem to stop him." "Maybe he really did rise from the dead."

They start to remember more about Jesus. As they do, they realize they know something deeper and stronger than the trauma they've experienced. They have known such love and hope and life in Jesus' presence.

Slowly they begin to imagine other possibilities - perhaps that love cannot be stopped, maybe that life that is stronger than death and hope will arise again. Light seeps into their closed hearts and minds. The stones of fear and anxiety start to roll away. Pain and fear lose their grip and they run from the tomb to share the news that Jesus is risen. They experience resurrection, as do the apostles, eventually.

This is what the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection does for us, for our brains and our bodies. It changes things.

It breaks through all that entombs us in fear and despair. It interrupts our hardwired anxious and negative thinking to remind us of what is deeper and truer - God's love is stronger than death. Life and hope cannot and will not be ended by evil and hate.

Slowly the stones are rolled away, the light seeps in, new possibilities emerge, hope arises. We can hear birdsong again.

This has happened for Kacey, the Columbine survivor and mom. Faith has begun to change the panic and fear she experiences each morning, reminding her that love is deeper and stronger than the trauma. She now approaches mornings as an opportunity to shower her children with love. She feeds them a good meal and prays aloud for them on the drive to school. She sees it as her mission to send them out into the world knowing that they are absolutely **ADORED** and **LOVED** no matter what. It's still hard, but it helps.

This is what the good news of Jesus does - it changes us.

This is what happens for us on Easter and each Sunday as we gather to celebrate the resurrection. We stand in the light of a new day and hear astonishing good news. We lift up our heads, we breathe together, and we begin to remember something deeper and stronger than all the trauma and anxiety. Together we remind each other of love and life and hope. The risen Christ feeds us with a good meal of bread and wine, signs of his risen presence among us. We are opened to new life. We are able to hear the birds sing again.

Those angels stand in an empty tomb and they tell us to remember - He is risen.
In Jesus you are LOVED and ADORED no matter what.
He is risen and we will arise.
Lift up your heads, sing out with joy.
Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Thanks be to God.