

New Life Starts Here
Luke 24:1-12
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
April 17, 2022 (Easter Sunday)
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Today we celebrate new life.

We celebrate miraculous life.

We celebrate unbelievable life.

We celebrate we-want-to-believe-it life.

Today we proclaim in the reading of the resurrection story, in our songs and alleluias, that new life has begun. We claim that new life starts here.

Even as we root that claim in the story of Jesus, even as we look back and hear the stories and celebrate something *about* Jesus, we *don't* just claim that new life started *there*...in an empty tomb...in some words spoken by two figures in dazzling clothes...in the commingled belief and disbelief of the disciples. We don't just claim that new life started *there*...nearly two thousand years ago in the person of Jesus.

But today we are invited to make the bold claim that new life starts here...now...with us...in us.

In our Easter Sunrise service earlier today we shared a poem by Rev. Sarah Speed that contained these lines, "Maybe the resurrection was not just about God's body, but is about our body. Maybe this new life reaches all the way to the edges. Maybe we are free to live in a new way where love is the currency and we are enough. Maybe that's what this is all about—not a relentless pursuit of more but God's relentless pursuit of me. New life is right here" ("New Life is Right Here" by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed, for *Full to the Brim* series, sanctifiedart.org).

So, how 'bout it, friends?

What would it mean for us to celebrate Easter not just as Jesus' new life, but as ours?

If we were starting fresh today? If we were choosing again to root ourselves in Jesus and to embrace the fullness of life? What would it look like?

And I don't ask these questions in the sense that we often ask questions about new year's resolutions. I'm not inviting you into commitments that you know you won't ever keep. I'm not asking you to use Easter as another day to restart your exercise routine or to make a commitment to daily devotions at 6 o'clock every morning. If those things have a place in your life, great! But the new life I'm talking about is something more...something bigger.

And it begins with rooting ourselves in the heart of God.

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You might remember, if you were participating in our daily readings and actions during Holy Week, that on Monday of this past week, the day in Holy Week that traditionally focuses on the story of Jesus turning over the tables in the temple, we instead heard a verse from Jesus' baptism where the voice of God speaks and claims Jesus as the beloved. And then we challenged ourselves to look in a mirror...to look ourselves in the eyes...and to see our belovedness...to claim that identity for ourselves, an identity God has long ago claimed for each of us...that of belovedness.

See, that's where new life begins. It's where it began for Jesus. It was in love. It was in his identity as a beloved child of God. That is where he was rooted in his life...in his death...and in his resurrection. That is where the early church was rooted.

Friends, we are so far from the events of that first Easter that unless we read the scriptures with honesty, we often forget to acknowledge the fear, the dread, the horror, the deep grief of those who knew and loved Jesus.

It wasn't only because of their ability to believe the unbelievable that the disciples were able to keep going. But it was because they, too, were rooted in love. If they hadn't known it before, they learned it from Jesus. If they hadn't believed it in fullness, they were coming to...little by little and bit by bit.

In the women's proclamation of the unbelievable, they claimed that love had won and that new life was beginning.

In Peter's risky run to the tomb, he claimed that he wanted to believe that love had won...he claimed that new life might just be possible.

So, what about us?

What would it look like for us to believe or to simply hope enough that we might start to act our way into belief? What would it look like if we lived in a way that said: new life starts here?

Do you have any ideas? Are there things that come to mind?

Perhaps the first thing we would have to come to terms with is our tendency to look for the living among the dead.

I love that line in the scripture. Luke writes, "While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over... be crucified, and on the third day rise again'" (Luke 24:4-7, NRSV).

Why do you look for the living among the dead? Well, we understand why the women did. After all, they watched him be crucified. The gospels tell us that while the men, or at

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least most of them, were hiding in fear, the women stood witness. And they watched as his body was taken down. And they watched as it was placed in the tomb. And they readied the spices so they could prepare his body, properly, for burial, for the death that had come.

So, it is no wonder they went to find him in the place of the dead. After all, they weren't looking for the living...they had seen Jesus die.

And yet, these mysterious figures said, "Remember...remember what he told you...remember what you know." And in remembering, they began to see the possibility and to look for life.

So, what about us? What would it take for us to seek life in places where it can grow and be nurtured?

Nancy Claire Pittman, in reflecting on today's scripture writes, "We cling to former visions of ourselves and our churches as if they might come back to life as long as we hold onto them. We grasp our loved ones too tightly, refusing to allow them to change, to become bigger, or smarter, or stronger. We choose to stay with what we know in our hearts to be dead, because it is safe, malleable, and so susceptible to burnishing through private memory" ("Homiletical Perspective on Luke 24:1-12", Nancy Clair Pittman, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*, 351)

Our own Marian Hart added some questions to the conversation. She wondered aloud to me if the secular world would ask of the church, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Would they see the church as dead in hypocrisy, dead in self-righteousness, dead in complacency? And what would it take for us to make sure we are alive in Christ?

What would it look like for us to live lives where we let go of what was dead and let the living live? How would we change? How would our churches change? How would our world change?

What if we, rooted in the knowledge and full embrace of our belovedness, embraced life and claimed again and again that new life starts here?

Friends, today we celebrate Jesus' new life. We also embrace the possibility of ours. We are God's beloved. And we can live from God's heart. And when we do, then each day we might just find that, again and again, new life starts with us...that new life truly starts here. Amen.