

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC
April 15, 2018

“Resurrection Wonders”

“While in their joy they were disbelieving
and still wondering, Jesus said to them,
“Have you anything to eat?””
Luke 24:41

Prelude:

Our lesson this morning invites us to continue
reflecting upon the theme of resurrection, the
startling assertion Christians make:

Christ is risen.
Christ is risen, indeed.

It isn't just the declaration,
“Christ is risen!”
that gives some pause.

What compounds the
wonder of resurrection for Christians
(resurrection referring to **“rising,”**
rebirth; a re-creation),
is not the promise or possibility of rising,
but the who, the one who was risen.
The one risen is the one
who was crucified.
The one glorious, beautiful,
“bright shining like the sun” (see Matthew 17:2)
is one and the same with the one
who had no form or majesty
that attracted no notice, the one
once despised and rejected,
held to be of no account (see Isaiah 53:3).

Few worked harder to keep the connection
intact – the crucified with the Risen –

as did the apostle Paul – as when writing to the Corinthians – noting **“Jews demands signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God”** (see I Corinthians 1:22-24).

Such gospel was made possible by resurrection wonder.

Resurrection was a popular belief in the first century when the Jesus movement first emerged, with a traceable history. Some did possess hope of resurrection (Pharisees)– and some were encamped in an outlook that denied such hope (Sadducees). Jesus, you may recall, was once asked to weigh in on the question; he was presented with a hypothetical about a woman who survived a slew of husbands (seven to be exact). Then the woman (a true profile in courage) died.

In the resurrection, Jesus was asked, to which one of the seven would she be wife (Luke 20:27-40; Matthew 22:23-33).

Jesus did not flatter those who denied resurrection. He dismissed them, saying, You have it all wrong! **“You are wrong ... you know neither scriptures nor the power of God ... God is not God of the dead but of the living”** (Matthew 22:32).

In our New Testament scriptures, we find various angles, different perspectives, concerning resurrection in general, and the resurrection of Jesus in particular. We can detect in our “sacred story”

a literary evolution of resurrection teaching.

For Paul, resurrection was affirmed
as an **“appearance.”**

Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior,
“appeared.”

Paul can recite a history of the appearances:
First to Cephas, then to the twelve
(odd really, for it raises the question of
Judas and his replacement);
Then to more than 500 at one time – some still
around to tell about it, though some not
(I Corinthians 15:5-6). Paul then adds –
**“then he appeared to James,
then to all the apostles. Last of all,
as to one untimely born,
he appeared also to me”** (I Corinthians 8).

Paul was taught this history;
but also invested in it,
for resurrection wonder was his-story.
He was informed by experience.
He had encountered Christ,
the crucified, the risen.

Note what is not in Paul’s writing.
No women. No empty tomb.
And no hint of wrestling that comes
when we consider the
question of resurrection.

I mention this for Luke’s gospel is quite full of
Resurrection wonder, and the wrestling that
accompanies it.

Pause with me here.

The resurrection dimension of our faith –
is full of wonder – and it requires that
we think through it, that we process it,

to understand it, as best we are able.

I recall as children, the newspaper that came into the house – the Columbus Dispatch – included a feature called “**Ripley’s Believe it or Not.**” Back near the comics, in the printed ink of a box or circle, something strange, bizarre, odd or unusual would be mentioned, accompanied by the challenge: Believe it, or Not. Mr. Robert Ripley turned this enterprise into an empire of sorts, Ripley reports airing on radio, TV, appearing in comic books, or other books with pages of newspaper reprints. Ripley’s interest lives on today – in a veritable industry of the odd and the unusual designed to intrigue.

Luke’s gospel offers us a Ripley moment. It is narrative that works at promoting resurrection wonder, and the wrestling such wonder brought into the hearts and minds of the early Christians.

In Luke we have women showing up at the tomb; They have an angel encounter, who reports: “**He is not here, but risen.**” They head back home, and speak of what they saw and heard. But the words were received with skepticism. They “**seemed (but) an idle tale**” and the disciples did not believe. No comma, there. Period. They did not believe.

It is in Luke that we get the story of two disciples walking the Emmaus Road, Cloepus with an unnamed companion. And they are joined by a fellow traveler, identified as a “stranger.” They walk and talk and reflect upon what news they received – that of Jesus’ tomb having been emptied, and the women, who had “**seen a vision of angels,**” and the report that

Jesus was alive.
Cleopus and friend are attracted to the stranger.
Evening comes. They beg the man to stay. They
break bread. **Their eyes were opened.**
Yet in the moment of recognition,
 he is said to have **“vanished.”**
They reverse course, Cleopus and friend,
return to Jerusalem, knock on the disciples' door,
and report their resurrection wonder:
The Lord was made known to us in the breaking of bread.

Right beside this passage falls our morning lesson.
Indeed, as they were talking – Jesus stands among them.
Speaks words that we repeat to this day:
“Peace be with you.” Resurrection wonder.
And it is a Ripley moment: Believe it or not.

The disciples did, and they didn't.

What verses follow reflect the jarring
 intensity of the mystery,
a strange new reality, the wonder of
communion in a way
that can't be confined to language.

The participants in this Easter encounter are
Terrified ... they wonder ... is this a specter, a ghost.
They are quizzed: **“Why do doubts arise in your hearts?”**
Look at my hands, and feet ... this is real.
Realer than real, believe it or not.

And then, in yet another twist to the plot,
while filled with joy and while disbelieving
 and still wondering, Jesus speaks:
“Have you got anything to eat?”

Believe it or not.

There follows a quick class on

scripture and resurrection wonder;
 Jesus, we read, “**opened their minds
 to understand the scripture,**”
 a rather nice bookend to the Emmaus exp.
 where their eyes were opened.
 And then, with wonder not yet exhausted,
 we are given a sense of where this gospel is headed.
 a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins,
 is to be taken into the world in Jesus’ name,
 even unto to all nations.

Believe it or not.

What dare we do with this today?

1.
 In resurrection wonder there is room for doubt.
 The scriptures affirm this,
 they give permission to doubt, to wrestle.
 I speak of this not to encourage it,
 but simply to recognize it.
 A “settled certainty”
 is not the end game of our faith;
 living with an openness to
 resurrection wonder is.

It comes to us with daily intrigue.
 After Easter, every day, every encounter,
 is an experience with the risen Christ.

P. Tillich, who spoke of faith as “**ultimate concern,**”
 an ultimate concern that comes, not as something
 we will – that we do – but a faith that arises having
 been grasped by the “**infinite.**” Doubt is an intrinsic
 dimension in such a faith understanding.
 For the questions spill out. Am I living, am I defending,
 am I honoring, am I serving, am I expending, am I

in Memphis, the night before his morning assassination.

**“Let us develop a kind of
dangerous unselfishness.”**

April 3, 1968, Mason Temple, Memphis, TN
(just prior to re-telling the story of the Good Samaritan).

This is the flaw in any enterprise designed
to “Make America Great Again.” Nations engaged
in making themselves great are full of
dangerous selfishness.

The Christian who can’t see that is blind –
blind to resurrection wonder.

***** ***** ***** *****

3. Are we to believe that Jesus Christ,
the crucified and risen Savior, gets hungry?

Jesus saying, **“Have you got anything to eat?”**
(Luke 24:41). I’m quite tempted to explain it away,
To dismiss it as more a resuscitation report than a
Resurrection wonder.

An emphasis upon a physical resurrection
eclipses the nuanced mystery that is so evident elsewhere;
and for fundamentalists, who crave literalism, it
reinforces a teaching on “bodily resurrection” that I reject.
Body always needs be qualified. **“Flesh and blood can not
inherit the kingdom of God.”** (I Corinthians 15:50),
nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”
Paul takes considerable time pressing the point, that
the body resurrected is not in a mortal framework
(see I Corinthians 42-49).

Yet, I’m intrigued.
The crucified and risen Savior,

subject to hunger?

If so, then I suggest it may be a hunger that suffers for humanity, a hunger for communion, a hunger to embrace those who experience no embrace, to love those who have no love, a hunger that is a desire to impart God's blessing where and with whom it is needed.

Believe it or not.

And if you do, dare not settle for anything less than being an accomplice, committed to dangerous unselfishness, with love largely suited for the world.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*