

BaptistWay Bible Series for February 24: The Worst and Best of Times

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The Worst and Best of Times

- Mark 14:61b-64; 15:9-24, 37-41; 16:1-8

By Andrew Daugherty

Christ Church, Rockwall

Imagine that Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James probably pulled an all-nighter that first Easter eve. Their commitments to keeping Jewish Sabbath kept them from paying their respects to Jesus the day before. So in the pre-dawn darkness they dressed, gathered their purses full of perfumes and crept nervously to the cemetery. Cemeteries tend to have that effect on people. They are places we go to visit. They are not places we go to stay. Cemeteries are places where we whisper if we have something to say not places where we feel comfortable making too much noise.

Hear these women whisper to each other as they bundle up on a chilly spring morning and shuffle their feet along the damp ground through the early morning fog. They will try to keep their voices down, but there's no guarantee these women will stay silent once they lay their eyes on the

empty tomb!

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I've never visited a cemetery on Easter Sunday before, but I can imagine what the feeling might be to want to shout, "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" But instead of hearing a whole chorus of voices shouting back, "Christ is risen indeed," you only hear birds chirping.

These first preachers of the resurrection may have had a similar experience. The women had groundbreaking news to announce: He is not here but has risen! Like the sound in the room after you've just told a corny joke, Luke's Gospel suggests that the disciples considered the women's words tabloid news; a tall tale and they did not believe them. Only Peter bothered to go and see for himself.

When the women fled from the tomb, they were struck with terror and amazement (16:8). They could hardly believe the Sunday morning news.

Few of us are ready to believe "news too good to be true" without some suspicion. We don't believe just because people tell us to; or because it's expected that's what a good Christian is suppose to believe. We want to draw our own conclusions. Part of our suspicion comes from our sense that good seems to be a perennial underdog to evil. We are so bombarded by the bad news of the latest car bombings and political scandals and rehab meltdowns and hurricanes and homicides, that when good news comes, we can hardly hear it and barely believe it.

Seems suffering and struggle and death are endemic to the human experience more than resurrection. “Good Friday Christians” is an apt characterization of many who hear the hope of resurrection. Yet such persons can become so accustomed to bad news that they end up camping out at the foot of the cross hoping that the next life will be better than this.

Sometimes it’s easier to think of resurrection as a past event that happened to Jesus or as a future event that will one day happen to us after we die. But all the joy and pageantry we relate to resurrection is about something more than just praising God for what will happen when our lives are over. In the meantime, we yearn to know what it is about Jesus’ resurrection that can help us live with God’s power and joy and justice and love now.

Kentucky novelist, farmer, and poet, Wendell Berry once wrote a poem that ends with the phrase, “practice resurrection.” It is a reminder that resurrection is more than just a belief in a past or future event. It is more to do with what we do than what we think. The poem begins “Love the quick profit, the annual raise, vacation with pay. Want more of everything ready-made. Be afraid to know your neighbors and to die. And you will have a window in your head. Not even your future will be a mystery anymore. Your mind will be punched in a card and shut away in a little drawer. When they want you to buy something, they will call you. When they want you to die for profit, they will let you know.” For Berry, this describes the consumer news report of our lives—that we are prisoners to profit...dominated by the fear that we never have enough stuff to keep up! But the Jesus of the resurrection insists there is a different way to live.

Fellow Texas pastor Kyle Childress once said that if a hospital practices medicine and a legal firm practices law, the church ought to be a place that practices resurrection. Of course, resurrection is something God does. But it is also something God can keep on doing through us. Resurrection isn’t confined to an empty tomb. We don’t need to spend any more time looking for the living among the dead. Resurrection lives and breathes among us

every time we come together for worship; every time we pray for each other; every time we feed a person whose hungry; every time we are gentle and kind to someone who's angry; each time we offer a good word to somebody else; or ask for forgiveness and offer forgiveness. And as we practice these things together, we are better able to see and know Christ among us.

Resurrection takes practice.

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