

For nearly 2000 years, billions of people have gathered, like we are today, on the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox to hear the good news of Christ's Resurrection. But it wasn't always like this. The actual day that Jesus rose from the dead nobody greeted him with joy, shouting "Alleluia! Christ is Risen!" The son of God, who was born in a stable, was crucified like a common criminal, overcame death, leaving an empty tomb with little fanfare or celebration. His disciples were hiding out in fear, traumatized by Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

It's the women who go to the tomb before dawn with spices for burial who are surprised by the stone being rolled away and the sight of two angels in dazzling clothes telling them that Jesus has risen.

As we see from Luke's gospel lesson this morning, when the women tell Jesus's disciples what they saw, they do not believe them that Jesus had risen from the dead. They thought the first preachers to proclaim the resurrection were telling an idol tale. The fact that the first preachers of the resurrection were women certainly had an impact on that (but that's another sermon for another day).

If Jesus's closest disciples struggled to believe that he had risen from the dead after all the time they spent with him it's no wonder people today still struggle to believe that the son of God was crucified, died, was buried, and resurrected.

Over time Christians have come to accept and embrace the power of the cross. We wear crosses around our neck and hang them on our walls.

We understand punishment and consequences for our sins. We know all too well about scapegoats and sacrifices. We transformed a brutal means of execution to be a symbol of salvation and love.

But I wonder if we have equally accepted and embraced the message of the empty tomb which proclaims the victory over death and the power of possibility, self-giving, and God's limitlessness. Jesus' resurrection goes against the natural order of things. It's hard to comprehend the fact that the empty tomb opened a new way of life for us. A new life where we are reconciled with God, despite our flaws and wrongdoings. Where we are forgiven and no longer burdened by sins we cannot amend through our own sacrifices. Where death has lost its sting because of the promise of everlasting life and reunion with those who have already passed.

For Christians, the cross and the empty tomb are inseparable.

Together the cross and the empty tomb proclaim that love wins.

That salvation is ours.

That hope is justified.

That faith is not foolish.

That mercy endures.

That peace is possible.

That joy abounds.

That death has lost its power.

That life is eternal.

Today is the day when we join with billions of other believers across time and space to rejoice in the good news of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension...

To give thanks for the women who first preached the resurrection and the disciples who overcame their fears to spread the good news of God in Christ to everyone they could so that we now know this was not an idol tale.

And to celebrate that Jesus has Risen and will not be found among the dead, not on a cross or in a tomb but among the living wherever there is love, mercy, hope, faith, peace, and joy.

May we be encouraged and inspired to continue to share the Good news of God's redeeming love to everyone we meet today and every day.