

## **“I’M STILL NOT SURE!”**

**Luke 24:36-48**

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The birth of a baby is one of God’s greatest miracles! Is there anything that causes us to smile more readily than seeing a young child? My wife and I were married for nearly four years before our first child was born, and we experienced some difficulty in the process. Barb was working the night shift as a nurse the night she got positive results from a pregnancy test. I was home asleep when the phone rang. “Hi dad!” she said. It was hours before I got back to sleep that night! First of all, I was excited. We had waited nearly four years for this moment. Now it was here! Then there was fear: would I be a good enough father? Could we provide for this child? We were barely making ends meet as it was. As a childless couple, we had our routine pretty well established. How would this baby change our lives, I wondered? Little did we know!

During the months of pregnancy we planned and prepared. We bought nursery furniture, diapers and all the rest. We thought we were ready. But when the big day came, and the labor pains started, everything became topsy turvy, in spite of our best efforts to stay calm. For example, at the desk when I registered at the hospital, in spite of the fact that I thought I was calm, cool and collected, when I gave them Barb’s birthday, I gave them the wrong day, wrong month, and wrong year!

The years of waiting turned out to be well worth the wait. After 36 hours of active labor, Tim entered the world a healthy baby boy. Once again, I couldn’t sleep that first night. I was simply overwhelmed by this miracle that had taken place. It would not be the last sleepless night I would have! There were the feedings, the diaper changes, the illnesses, the times when he was out late and mom and dad lay in bed worried. Oh, that was when he was a teenager, but it wasn’t long after he was born that he became a teenager, or so it seems. Yes, babies have a way of changing our lives. This gift of new life made permanent changes in Barb’s life and mine.

Someone has said, “New life never slips in the back door quietly or painlessly. Every birth is only the beginning of a lifetime of those powerfully disorienting moments, as infants become fully persons and make their mark on the world.”(1) So it is with the new life of resurrection faith as it unfolds in the Gospels and continues throughout church history. Easter is not confined to one day on the church calendar, as if to say, “Christ arose. Now let’s get back to business as usual” There is a whole season of Easter. In fact, our faith teaches that every Sunday is a “little Easter,” a day of celebration of the new life that God has placed before us — another miracle for us to grasp and integrate into our lives. Perhaps the reason why there is a “season” of Easter is to give us time to digest the idea that God is doing a brand new thing in our world today. It takes a while to get used to a new baby in the house. It takes a while to get used

to the Easter message that Jesus is alive and active in our midst, ready to transform our lives. It took the first disciples a while to catch on and begin living as God intends. It takes some of us a while to catch on today.

At the outset, the disciples seemed resigned to Jesus' death. The women prepared their spices and made their way to anoint the body of Jesus. The followers of Jesus expected to live with their losses, as victims of violence and suffering have always done. From the very first word of the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, though, that old "business as usual" script is challenged. Luke's account of the resurrection begins with a powerful disruption in the form of a single three-letter word: **but**. "But on the first day of the week," the story begins. In a leadership training experience that my wife and I were part of, a human relations expert told us that when we put "but" in a sentence, it negates or cancels out everything that comes before it. "I put a note on my calendar, but I forgot your birthday." "I intended to be here on time, but I had to stop for gas." "I'm on a diet, but I'll make an exception because it's your birthday." The "but" changes everything! That's what happens on Easter! The old way of thinking and believing is canceled out. A whole new era is begun.

Like the reality of the birth of a baby, the resurrection story comes over the disciples in waves. The impact doesn't affect them all at once. First, the women arrive at the tomb only to find the stone rolled away and to hear the news that Jesus is risen. They want to believe, but the Bible tells us that they are "terrified." The women don't know what to think. Do you suppose they laid awake that night pondering what a resurrected Jesus would mean for their lives and for their world? I'll bet they did.

The second wave of resurrection birthing and understanding comes later that afternoon as two of the disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus. They are joined by Jesus, but they fail to recognize him. Then, when they are at table, Jesus comes among them and breaks bread with them, and they recognize their risen Lord.

Finally, at the end of the day, Jesus appears to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem and says, "*Peace be with you.*" Although Jesus comes to bring peace, the Bible tells us that the disciples are "*startled and terrified.*" Throughout the Gospel story we find that fear is a common reaction to the resurrection of Jesus. Easter means that life is going to be different, and that scares us! If having a baby upsets our routine and reorganizes our lives, how much more should Easter cause an upheaval and a re-ordering of our priorities! Are we ready for Jesus to appear on our afternoon walks, at our dinner tables, in our evening meetings with colleagues and friends? He is here with us, you know, in all his resurrected power.

Now something curious happens. No sooner has Jesus said, "Peace be with you," than he shows them his hands and his feet. "See the nail prints in my hands. See the wound where the sword pierced my side." Jesus wants the disciples to understand that it really is him. It is not someone dressed up like Jesus. It is not a ghost. It really is Jesus.

But in showing them his wounds, he reminds the disciples in a very profound way how much he loves them and what he has sacrificed for them. His wounds are part of who he is. Sometimes we try to put on a "game face" when we are at church and pretend as if everything is fine, even when it is not. We don't want anybody to know our heartaches, our pain, our disappointment, the burdens we are carrying. But Jesus refuses to pretend! He shows the disciples his wounds. His wounds are part of who he is. Our wounds are part of who we are, too.

A little girl was sitting on her mother's lap. "Your eyes are so pretty, mommy. Your hair is so soft. But your arms, mommy. They are all rough and red. They are not pretty at all. Why are your arms rough and red?" Her mother replied, "One night I woke up and smelled smoke. I realized that the house was on fire. Quickly I ran into your room, grabbed you out of your crib and ran downstairs. We got out of the house alive, but my arms were badly burned. That's why they are rough and red." The little girl sat quietly for a while and then said, "Mommy, your eyes are so pretty. Your hair is so soft. But mommy, your arms: they are the prettiest part of all."

Jesus showed them his hands and his side. These wounds, repulsive and ugly, became a thing of beauty for they represent Jesus' loving sacrifice for those disciples and for us.

Now after showing the disciples his wounds, Jesus asks for something to eat. Again he is trying to communicate that the new life of resurrection is not mystical, but real. To eat with someone in the ancient Near East, to share their hospitality, is to be intimately connected to them, to be linked with them in a relationship of mutual responsibility and support. And so Jesus eats a meal with his disciples.

Even then the Bible tells us that the disciples were "*disbelieving and still wondering.*" How can it be? With the resurrected Christ sitting right in front of them, showing them his wounds, eating a fish dinner with them — still they are not sure about this resurrection business! Does this scenario describe your life? It describes mine. How often I have seen God's hand at work in my life and in the lives of others. Still I worry. Still I fail to trust God's promises. Fear and doubt still plague my life. I have seen the miracle of birth, physical birth and spiritual birth. Yet oftentimes I fear the future, when God has already assured me that he will be with me every step of the way.

When some of us hear the Gospel message, we experience guilt. Guilt that we have not trusted God more. Guilt that we have not followed the teachings of Jesus more closely. The resurrection calls us to move beyond guilt to repentance. Guilt is an emotion. Repentance is an action. When we repent, the question becomes, "How will we behave differently now that we have heard the Easter story?" Will we let it disrupt and reorganize our lives?

When Jesus appears to his disciples (including you, including me), he gives us a job to do, a task to perform. Jesus tells us that we are witnesses of God's disruptive actions. We are witnesses of the gift of new life that comes to us in the birth of every baby and in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The disciples (including you, including me) are told to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations. We are called to be agents of new life in a world where evidence of the resurrection is in short supply. We are called to proclaim the good news in a world where greed still causes people to do terrible things to one another, where selfishness and hate cause conflict and violence and war. We are called to proclaim God's message of new life, resurrection life in a world where disease is still rampant and death is a reality we confront every day. We are called to be agents of reconciliation in a world where relationships are often strained to the breaking point. We are called to be agents of hope in a world where many have a hard time envisioning the future.

In the midst of all the circumstances that cause us doubt and fear, we read again the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke that starts out with the word "but." All these negative things about our world are true. But then there was Easter! All that bad stuff happened, but God raised Jesus from the dead. And that changes everything!

How many Methodists does it take to change a lightbulb? Did someone say "change?"

Yes, the resurrection changes everything. It changes despair into hope, doubt into faith, hate into love, death into life. It will change you and me as well, if we let it!

**“I’m still not sure,”** we say as we hear the Easter message and think about the current state of our lives. New life never slips in the back door quietly and painlessly. Ask any new parent! But new life can be wonderful. Ask any new parent! How disruptive new life can be, and how wonderful!

Let us thank God for the miracle of new life, the miracle of resurrection life that started that first Easter morning and continues to disrupt and threaten and challenge our lives today. We are witnesses to what God has done and what God continues to do. Let us embrace the new life that God offers today!

*Prayer:* We see the miracle of new life all around us: in the birth of babies in our congregation and in the resurrection story on Easter Sunday. Help us to remember every Sunday, every day, that you offer new life to us. Let the promise of new life change our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Note:

1. Lindner, Cynthia Gano. *Christian Century*. Vol. 126. No 8., p. 20.