

“Full to the Brim: An Expansive Life”
Luke 24:1-12

In his book *The Last Slave Ship*, Ben Raines tells the horrific story of the *Clotilda* slave ship which was used to smuggle human beings into our country long after the slave trade was outlawed. At the beginning of the voyage, the captain hid 27 pounds of gold, “currency of the realm in slave transactions,” behind the bulkhead in his cabin because his crew did not know the real purpose of the voyage. As they started sailing “the *Clotilda* was never where she was supposed to be according to the course plotted on his chart. The ship drifted steadily off course all through the day, though the compass heading appeared true.” It was not until late at night that it finally hit the captain: “It was the gold. Twenty-seven pounds is a lot of gold, certainly enough to affect the magnetic field around it.” He needed to move the gold away from the helm of the ship. I read this part of the story symbolically. The gold that was going to be used to purchase human beings messed up the compass and the human soul of the captain and all the people who were involved. Blinded by greed, these people lost their inner guidance. This kind of experience is an extreme example of what often happens in our lives where we lose our ability to know the truth of life. Only when we allow God’s grace to replace the gold that glitters with false promises in our lives are we truly able to see life clearly.

That is why not everyone was able to experience the resurrection of Jesus at his time. Only those who knew and loved him were able to see with clarity. The resurrection of Jesus was very much like his birth: humble and accessible only to those who had the eyes to see. Those who were “wise” according to the standards of the world completely missed the power of his birth, his ministry, and his resurrection. The gold around their helm was heavy and blinding. They looked at the same events and saw what their faulty compass showed them.

Let’s listen to the story from Luke 24:1-12 first through a Bible Project video:

https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-luke-5/?utm_source=web_social_share&medium=shared_video

And from the NRSV:

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The 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.” ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe

them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.”

Even though Jesus had talked about his resurrection with his disciples, they didn't seem to expect it, at least not that quickly. When we hear the Gospel story from Luke 24 today, we hear that even the apostles, the early followers of Jesus did not believe and thought these were “idle tales.” This was a charge the women would have been used to. It was the kind of stereotyping and degrading that was part of their experience as women.

Yet, the women believed and were not afraid to proclaim their faith. Those on the fringes of society believed. They were not weighed down by the gold of power, esteem, or security. They had better access to their own inner life. They had been transformed after following Jesus to learn to trust their inner experiences of God. They had mystical experiences that gave them the assurance of the resurrection of Jesus and that was enough for them. I love that the whole story of Easter depended on the witness of a few women. The ministry of Jesus did not come with the kind of power which people were used to. Jesus came as a humble servant of love who served his people and worked on their transformation so that they may in turn transform the whole of society. The same was true of his resurrection. There were no big signs in the sky, fireworks, or appearances of Jesus on the streets of Jerusalem so that all would witness and believe. Instead, the story tells us that it was those who already believed had those experiences of faith. Those who were already in his company of disciples were the ones to know and experience the resurrection.

In the same way, Easter is about our God's grace entering into our lives and surprising us by shifting our focus to love instead of the gold of life. We often live diminished lives filled with fear, worry, loss, endless search for security, and approval. But when God's grace starts to find a place in our hearts, we start to live more expansive lives that are focused on love. When your vision is clouded, your heart is fearful, your mind is racing, or you lose your way, pray for God to help you see and let go of the gold that is leading you off course.

In his book *What We Forgot to Tell You*, Peter Gomes writes, “The evidence of Easter is a reconfigured Easter people, people who are no longer afraid of the dark, people who dare to live by their affections and not by their fears, people who know that they need not die in order to truly experience resurrection living. . . people who fear neither death nor life. . . .In short, people such as you and me who aspire to be people like that. We are the Easter people, for death, in all of its cynical, calculating, greedy ways, no longer has control over us. We have a better idea, we claim a greater truth, we live because we are loved; and because we are loved, we can live.”

This kind of wisdom is beautifully and simply expressed in the children's story, *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. It chronicles the story of a stuffed rabbit and his quest to become real through the love of his owner. One day while talking with the Skin Horse, the Rabbit learns that a toy becomes real if its owner really and truly loves it. Listen to their dialogue: “What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day. “Does it mean having things

that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?” “Real isn’t how you are made, ” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.” “Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit. “Sometimes, ” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.” “Does it happen all at once, like being wound up, ” he asked, “or bit by bit?” “It doesn’t happen all at once, ” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

Link to a video of the story: <https://youtu.be/s4CPhAEcj6o>

May you be blessed to always understand and see the deeper and sacred realities of life!
Amen.