

## **Glory!**

Easter Sunday 2020

Luke 24:1-12

Center Church, Hartford

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Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Wait a minute; hold the alleluia.

Did you hear any alleluia in the story we just heard from Luke's gospel? 12 verses and the closest we get to Alleluia is that Peter was "amazed." Most of what we get is confusion and disbelief. The women, having spoken with an angel and begun to remember Jesus saying something about rising again, went to the other disciples. They told them this crazy story, and the response of the disciples was not "Alleluia!" Luke writes, "these words seemed to them to be an idle tale." A fairy tale. Wishful thinking. A lie.

The women must have begun to doubt themselves. Confused, afraid, and alone, they were not singing alleluias. In Mark's version of this story, the women don't even tell the disciples, allegedly. No Alleluias at all, just "terror and amazement, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid."

When I worked in New Haven, I spent some time with a group of African American clergy who served small churches in the predominantly black and predominantly working-class section of New Haven called Newhallville, an area created by racist redlining in the 50's; an area many people of all races were afraid to be in because of violence. My colleagues had a practice on Saturday mornings called "Prayer Walks." They invited me to join them one Saturday, and despite my discomfort with that sort of thing, I tagged along. About 10 of us gathered in prayer, then we began to walk the blocks together, engaging people along the way, stopping to pray at school buildings and shops and by a house where there had been a shooting the week before.

As we walked, members of our group would often shout "Glory!" I looked at the poverty and struggle around me and I couldn't figure out why they were shouting "Glory!" What could that possibly mean in this situation?

My ignorance on many things is vast. My colleagues educated me. When I asked, one told me that they needed to remind people that what they saw

around them was not the end of the story by any means. That God is powerful and God loves them powerfully and is available to them to help them get through...whatever. That though what people saw was paint peeling and neighbors working three jobs just to keep up with the bills, // still, surrounding them, moving through them, empowering them, was Glory, God's Glory, the Spirit of the Living God more powerful than death. Glory to pull them out of the tombs of structured injustice and racism and despair, and into new life. Glory, glory, Hallelujah!

I find myself walking the empty downtown streets in Hartford these days, or sitting in my apartment listening to sirens, and helicopters flying to and from the hospital, or early in the morning running past those who have no home and no hope lying on benches in Bushnell Park, and I whisper, "Glory." "Alleluia." Not because what I see and hear is good, but because what I see and hear is not. I whisper "glory, alleluia" even though the love and power of God sometimes seems an idle tale to me in these days of suffering and fear. I listen to the news of millions unemployed, of those still employed in jobs where they interact with the public in danger because of a lack of equipment to deal with this virus, of bodies laid in graves, or refrigerated trucks, without ceremony or mourners, just like Jesus was. Sometimes Resurrection seems like an idle tale to me when I hear stories of people being abusive to grocery store workers if they don't get what they want, or bullying online by adults or teenagers, or people ignoring the need to stay away from others, or people purposefully coughing on others and saying they just gave them the virus, as though it were a joke.

In the midst of this, how can I say "glory, alleluia?"

As I was cleaning out my home desk last week, I came across a poem written for me by one of my mentors, the late Rus Barbour. One line of the poem exploded me out of my quiet despair. Rus wrote:

*"Let us fasten ourselves...to that unseen hovering hint of hope."*

That's what my colleagues in Newhallville did. That's what the angels tried to get across to the women. That's what the women tried to get across to the men. That's what Jesus spent his whole life trying to get us to understand and do. Fasten ourselves to that unseen, hovering hint of hope.

There is always God. Hovering, like a dove, like the Holy Spirit hovered over creation at the very beginning. Resurrection was that hope doing more than hovering; it was hope taking flight, like the rather improbable butterfly. You know

what a caterpillar looks like? Could you believe that it could ever become a butterfly?

And yet. Butterflies abound. Cocoons are hovering hints of hope fastened to tree branches. Each of us now, are cocooned like the not-quite-caterpillar-but-not-quite-butterfly. If we are Resurrection people, we are being changed not only by this virus and all the collateral damage it is causing to people's lives, but by the very act of needing to be cocooned. Remembering again what is truly life-giving, and realizing it is not how much toilet paper we can score or how many hours we can work or how important, or unimportant, we think we are.

Today, in the midst of our cocoons, we need to bring back the Alleluia's! To say, "Glory," with the vision of a smashed open grave and angels in dazzling clothes and, eventually, the risen Christ walking through a door to say "peace be with you." To say Alleluia no matter what you are looking at any moment of the day, even an empty room, even a computer screen.

Bring back the Alleluias. Whisper them if you need to, at the store, to your screen, on your sidewalk, in your kitchen, in line waiting for a COVID-19 test, when you've had it and just want things to get back to whatever passed for normal before the middle of March. Bring back the alleluias even if it seems foolish or unreasonable or inappropriate to be joyful in these times; as the old gospel song says, "sing alleluia anyhow!" Be on the lookout for "hovering hints of hope" and fasten yourself to them, for the holy, often invisible power of God is working in our cocoons. If you don't see Resurrection everywhere at first, look again. Remember that one gospel story says Mary didn't recognize the risen Jesus when he was right in front of her, because she didn't expect to see him. Expect God; expect good. Bring back the Alleluias and say them in more places than church.

*Glory! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!!*