

Day of the Resurrection

REMEMBERING THE PROMISE

Luke 24: 1-12

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Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

24But 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Forgotten

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Perplexity, Fear and Dismissiveness*

The women who went to the tomb were "perplexed," Luke tells us,

when they found the stone rolled away from the tomb and then “did not find the body.” They were also “terrified” when the “two men in dazzling clothes” stood beside them. But they were not the only ones with a problem. When the eleven and “all the rest” heard what the women reported, they thought it was all an “idle tale.”

Does any of this surprise us? We’d be perplexed, too, if we found the grave of a loved one empty two days after the funeral . . . and fearful, if we were confronted in the cemetery by two fellows in shiny suits . . . and dismissive, if we heard this story from someone else.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Amnesia*

But there’s more to it than that. The women (and then the eleven and all the rest) had a deeper problem than just that they were perplexed and fearful and dismissive. They were that way because they were not remembering what Jesus had told them while he was still in Galilee. That is, they did not trust him when he said that his merciful way of operating, which would “have to” [δεῖ] result in his betrayal and crucifixion, would also “have to” [δεῖ] be vindicated by God (“... and on the third day rise again”).

The betrayal and crucifixion had to happen, as Luke makes clear throughout his Gospel. It had to happen not only because sinners resent it when mercy is shown to someone else; it also had to happen because mercy is not just—and there is no disputing that God loves justice.

Jesus knew that and continued to operate with mercy anyway. He did it because he trusted that, as much as his heavenly Father required justice, his heavenly Father loved mercy even more. So he had told them all that the Son of Man must [δεῖ] rise again as well.

Not to trust that promise is not to trust that God's preferred way of operating with human beings is by mercy. When the women were reminded of that promise, we are told that "they remembered." Not so with the apostles. "They did not believe them," Luke tells us. And by not believing the women, they made it clear that they were not believing ("remembering") what Jesus had told them while he was still in Galilee.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Unreachable*

Such dismissal creates an even deeper problem. The problem with not "remembering/trusting" the promise that God prefers mercy over even God's own justice—a promise made to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus—is that we end up not getting the benefits of that promise. If we never trust that promise, how can we ever make use of it? How can we ever enjoy it? How can we ever have our fears assuaged, the fears that inevitably come from believing that everyone should receive only what they deserve?

Since God has so graciously arranged it so that we have forgiveness (and all the life and healing that comes with forgiveness) simply by trusting the promise of forgiveness Jesus makes to us, if we do not remember/trust his words, we do not have what he offers. In fact, what else can God say to us then but, "You are unreachable to me"? What else can God say if God offers it all to us as a gift ... and we say "Forget it"?

PROGNOSIS: Remembered

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Remembering—and Reaching Out anyway*

Aren't you glad, then, that God remembers anyway—even when we have told God to "forget it"? Aren't you glad, that is, that God remembers God's promise of mercy and not our sins.

No wonder the resurrection of our Lord is such great news and so

central for us. By raising Jesus from the dead, God assures us all that God has not forgotten us or the promise of mercy God has made to us.

(Jesus' resurrection, you see, is good news not just for Jesus. It is great good news for us, too. It is God's own approval of what Jesus had been saying and doing all along: offering the mercy and forgiveness of God to all.)

And not only does God remember; God also reaches out—again and again—to let us know that God has not decided to forget us or “the promise of mercy he made to our ancestors” (1:54-55). At first, it was through two men in dazzling clothes that God reached out. Then it was through the women who told the eleven and all the rest. God reached out to perplexed and fearful and even dismissive ones and provided messengers to deliver this good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Remembering / Trusting

Today, we still have messengers in dazzling clothes (like albs and stoles and chasubles), but we also have messengers in regular clothes, the clothes they wear in their homes and workplaces and schools. God continues to remember and to reach out through messengers wearing all kinds of garb, all so we can hear the promise (and trust it) that God's mercy for us is stronger even than God's justice—and hence, stronger than death.

It doesn't matter whether the promise comes through uniformed (dazzling clothes) messengers or through the plainclothes variety. What matters is whether it's the promise that the messengers are delivering. How else could the women have “remembered” if the messengers had not reminded them of that promise?

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Speaking

Fearlessly

The women “told this to the apostles and all the rest.” Of course they did! Once God renewed their trust in God’s mercy, how could they not have told them? The news that God’s desire to show us mercy is stronger even than death is news too good to keep to oneself. (See the similarities with chapter 2? The shepherds couldn’t keep the news to themselves, either.)

So the women told the apostles. And that’s what we do, too: When God gets it through to us what this resurrection means—and we trust it, we become messengers ourselves.

Our speaking out, of course, is never only in words. Luke will make this clear in his second volume as he recounts how those apostles (and others) lived out their proclamation once God got them to trust the good news the women brought to them.

So do we live out what we proclaim when we trust the implications of our Lord’s resurrection. Our lives demonstrate what our lips proclaim. And in whatever way we can, we bring the mercy of God to all who need it.