

A sermon preached the Congregational Church of Almaden Valley, United Church of Christ  
San Jose, CA  
Date: April 4, 2010  
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Luke 24:1-12 (Isaiah 65:17-25)

### ***Resurrections***

Easter. Do you need evidence or do you need visions? What is your faith dependent upon? Do stories have to be true for them to have meaning? Can you find meaning even without faith? Easter raises a lot of questions for people of modern minds. For a people trained to follow scientific methods—and there are a lot of us like that here in the Silicon Valley—rationality and reason are highly regarded and highly valued. But let me ask you, where would even Silicon Valley be without vision?

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, two modern theologians who happen to be Christians have written a wonderful book titled *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006). In this book they have a discussion about whether Easter is indeed a true historical account or whether the Easter story is another parable, like the parable stories that Jesus used to convey meaning to his disciples and others who would listen. What would you rather hear from me this morning—that the resurrection story of Easter is factual history or is a parable that has great meaning for how we live our lives today? How you answer that question may say a lot about how you approach matters of faith in your life. Hear what Borg and Crossan say about the parable:

When we see these stories as *parable*, the “model” for this understanding is the parables of Jesus. Christians agree that the meaning of Jesus’ parables is not dependent upon whether they are historically factual. We don’t know any Christians who worry about whether there really was a good Samaritan who came to the rescue of a man who had been robbed and beaten by bandits or whether there really was a father who lavishly welcomed home his prodigal son, or who say that these stories aren’t true just because they didn’t happen. [Borg and Crossan go on to write that] the obvious insight is that parables can be true—truthful and truth-filled—independently of their factuality...Seeing the Easter stories as parable does not involve a denial of their factuality...Seeing the Easter stories as parable, as

parabolic narratives, affirms, “Believe whatever you want about whether the stories happened this way—now let’s talk about what they mean.”<sup>1</sup>

This is really good news because whether we are strong rationalists or Biblical literalists we can, perhaps, have a conversation about Easter—and that conversation is not about facts but about the truth and meaning of the story.

In our Easter account this morning from the Gospel of Luke we have one set of people who see a vision or shall we say have vision, and another person who experienced the facts, we might say. The women who come to the tomb to perform their religious ritual of preparing the body for final burial are shocked and terrified when they go into the tomb only to find two men in dazzling white clothes questioning them about their listening skills: *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.* <sup>6</sup>*Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,* <sup>7</sup>*that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.* <sup>8</sup>*Then they remembered his words,* <sup>9</sup>*and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.* (Luke 24:5b-9) The vision these women have jogs their memories about the prediction that Jesus will overcome oppression and betrayal and defeat those forces by rising again, even the death-dealing forces can be overcome.

Then we have Peter, who did not have any such vision, but he first wanted to check out the facts for himself. Was there really an empty tomb? Was the stone really rolled away? What Jesus really gone from the tomb? And the storyteller, Luke, writes *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.* (Luke 24:12) He came, he saw, and he was amazed!

How many Easters have you known? Raise your hands if you have been aware of ten Easter Sundays in your life? Raise your hands if you have been aware of 15 Easter Sundays in your life? 20? 30? 40? 50? 60? 70? 80? Think of all the times we have heard the Easter story. And, because you are here this morning, I assume it’s because you love hearing it, don’t you? As we read each word and each sentence of the gospel stories whether they be from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John our heartbeats a little faster to get to the empty tomb! We love hearing this story? Why do we love this

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<sup>1</sup> Borg, Marcus and Crossan, John Dominic. *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’ Final Days in Jerusalem*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006, pp. 192-3.

story so much? Whether we believe it factually happened or not why do we love this story so much?

Now some might say the Easter story gives us hope that there really is life after death. But I would guess a lot of us would say that we love it so much because it gives us hope that life—that our very lives we are living right now can be renewed, can be resurrected. To paraphrase Borg and Crossan *Easter is about you and me overcoming the powers of this life—no matter what they are—can be overcome!*<sup>2</sup> Borg and Crossan stated it this way: *God has said “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the powers who executed him. Easter is not about an afterlife or about happy endings. Easter is God’s “yes” to Jesus against the powers who killed him.*<sup>3</sup> What are the powers that are “killing us” or maiming our souls? Are they addictions, jealousies, hatreds, revenge, coveting things we don’t need, desires that run our lives but don’t fulfill our needs, anger, insecurity, or fears? We love the Easter story and we come back to hear it again and again year after year because it gives us hope, and courage, and we experience Easter with one another and that makes us feel that we are not alone. We don’t have to face the powers that would kill our souls alone. That is what church is about. That is what coming to church week and after week, Christmas after Christmas, Easter after Easter is about—it’s about sharing the hope of our own resurrections that don’t have to wait until we are dead and buried, but can live within us right now, right here, today. And sharing it with others gives us companionship and strength. Church is not about judgment and guilt trips, its about having companions along this journey we call life and giving and sharing with one another so that our lives can be resurrected over and over again when we need it. God bless you for being here this morning! I hope to see you in many more Sundays to come. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 205.

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