

These Windows Can Speak
Part 5: Going Home
Reflections on Resurrection
In Honour of Ernie and Marjorie Wanless
Text: Luke 12:32-40
Preached by Bruce D. Ervin
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It's been said that there are three good arguments that Jesus was Black: He called everyone "brother," he liked gospel, and he didn't get a fair trial.

But there are three equally good arguments that Jesus was Jewish: He went into his father's business, he lived at home until he was 30, and he was sure that his mother was a virgin and she was sure that he was God.

However, there are also three good arguments that Jesus was a Californian: He never cut his hair, he walked around barefoot all the time, and he started a new religion.

But the most compelling evidence of all: three proofs that Jesus was a woman: He fed a crowd at a moment's notice when there was virtually no food; he kept trying to get a message across to a bunch of men who just didn't get it; and even when he was dead, he had to get up because there was still work to do.

You can't just lie around for eternity. There's work to be done, places to go, people to look after. Jesus had to get up that resurrection morning. And in so doing he offered us a foretaste of what the spiritual calls "that great gettin' up morning," when *all* the saints from *every* age shall rise from their rest of years or decades or centuries. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15:52, "The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Our theme this morning is resurrection. And our focus for that theme is the window at the back of the Sanctuary, given to this church by the late Ernie and Marjorie Wanless. It depicts the scene in the garden outside Jesus' tomb. Mary Magdalene has come to the tomb that morning to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial. When she arrives, the tomb is empty. There's a man there whom she takes to be the gardener. But when he calls her by name, she realizes that it is Jesus. He has been raised from the dead! She opens her arms to hug him – which is of course what any of us would do – but Jesus says,

"Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Now before we go on, we have to clear up three major misunderstanding about the biblical doctrine of resurrection.

First of all, Jesus' resurrection was not a stand alone event. It was rather the first sign of the coming day when *all* of God's people will be raised (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-28). And this won't happen right away. It will happen at the end of history. You see, the Bible offers little evidence for the notion that when

we die, our souls are suddenly whisked away to eternal bliss. That's the conventional notion, and we preachers often lend support to that notion by the way in which we fudge our words in funeral homilies. And I will plead guilty to doing that myself. But if we read the words of the Bible carefully – especially the words of St. Paul – we discover that this is not an instantaneous blessing but a future promise. When we're dead, we're dead. We go into a state which Paul compares to being asleep. And it's a *long* sleep; maybe for hundreds or thousands or millions of years, because who knows when Jesus will return and history will come to a close? From the perspective of history, we sleep for a *long* time. But from the perspective of eternity, that passage of time is short indeed. It is but a moment; like the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51). It's like, if someone stays up all night and watches you sleep, it is a long night. But for you, if you sleep soundly, the night passes in an instant. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. I don't know about you, but when my time comes, I'm looking forward to a long and sound sleep! You can keep watch at my grave if you want to, but it might be a long wait. Meanwhile, from the perspective of eternity, it's going to be but a moment, a mere twinkling of an eye, before the trumpet will sound and you and I and all the saints will be raised and gathered up into the arms of God.

And when we are raised – and here's the second misunderstanding – we will have bodies. We don't simply leave our bodies behind and live on as disembodied souls; that's the idea of Greek philosophy which the Bible mostly rejects. No, we get to trade in our old, tired physical bodies for brand new spiritual bodies. The Bible says that it's kind of like taking off old clothing and putting on new clothes (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). Or again, it's like when a seedling casts aside the shell of the seed and takes on instead the new body of a young plant (1 Corinthians 15:35-44). When Jesus was raised from the dead, he was raised not with a resuscitated physical body, but with a new spiritual body. Maybe that's why Mary didn't recognize him at first; part of the reason, anyway.

So, the resurrection has to do with the future raising of all the saints, who are raised with spiritual bodies, and we are raised so that God's justice might be vindicated. What gave rise to the Jewish concept of the resurrection, several hundred years before Jesus' time, was the question, "Why do the greedy and the evil and the sinful prosper in this crazy world, while the good suffer?" The answer was that the good will not always suffer; the greedy will not always prosper. There will come a time *beyond* time, there will come a place *beyond* space, where the good and the greedy alike will be raised, and the good and the greedy alike will be judged. *But*, the tables will be turned, and this time the *good* will be the ones who will prosper, and God's kingdom of justice will finally be realized (see Matthew 25:31-46). The Bible, especially Matthew's gospel, suggests that at this point the greedy and the evil will be sent away to eternal damnation. My sense is that actually it will be more like a daycare centre. Those who have been greedy with their financial resources and have oppressed the poor will have to sit on a chair for a while and then God will ask them, "Can you manage?"

So, the resurrection has to do with *all* the dead being raised, it has to do with the clothing of the newly raised in spiritual bodies, and it has to do with the vindication of God's justice; God's righteousness.

But what, you may ask, does this have to do with me: right here and now? That may be what Jesus' listeners were asking him in today's gospel lesson, because Jesus says this: you have to be aware. You have to live every day as if *this* is the day when Messiah will come; this is the day of resurrection (Luke 12:32-40).

You have to be aware. You have to be looking for signs that Messiah is bringing the kingdom of righteousness, and the resurrection is near. When the homeless have all found a home, know that the kingdom is near. When poverty and hunger have been eradicated, know that the kingdom is near. When the nations decide to ban nuclear weapons forever, know that the kingdom is near.

But not only then: when you see people providing affordable housing for even just a few, know that the kingdom is near. When just one person no longer needs to use a food bank because he's found a decent job that pays a living wage, know that the kingdom is near. When even one war ends and a just peace is negotiated, know that the kingdom is near.

So first of all, be aware. Secondly, be prepared. Jesus says, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps on" (Luke 12:35). When you hear the kingdom drawing near, like a train pulling into the station in the middle of the night, you have to be dressed for action and prepared to get on board. And that means that you have to travel lightly. "Sell your possessions and give alms," Jesus says (Luke 12:33). In other words, cast aside those things that you don't really need (which is probably most of what you have); and, being no longer encumbered by so many possessions, live a life of generosity and action. If you live every day as if this is the resurrection day, you won't need all of those things because they're going to be left behind anyway (see Luke 12:16-21). If you're going to follow Jesus in the ways of justice and peace, if you're going to live your lives as if the kingdom is already here, then you need to travel lightly.

If you're going to live every day as if this is the day when the resurrection will happen, you have to be aware, be prepared and dare to trust eternity. You don't have to have it all now, because you have eternity to enjoy. You don't have to do it all now because you have eternity to experience. You don't have to get super comfortable here because your *real* place of comfort is over there, beyond time and space. That's where your *real* home is. In this world we are like Abraham: seeking a home, seeking a kingdom of justice and peace and love. We don't know for sure where and when we're going to find it, but we *do* know that we *will* find it. We haven't seen it yet, but we know that it's coming. Faith is the assurance of things *hoped* for, the conviction of things *not* seen (Hebrews 11:1).

Dare to trust eternity. Or, as Jesus put it, store up your treasure in heaven (see Luke 12:33). You see, we tend to live as if time is absolute; as if this time is the only time that we have, as if it's now or never if we are to get everything that

there is to get out of life. And, yes, there's some wisdom in that. We are called to live life as fully as we can now; we are called to live life abundantly now (see John 10:10), but not *only* now. Scientists tell us that time is relative. That was one of Albert Einstein's great insights: time is relative. That which is absolute is *beyond* time. The fullest expression of life is lived *beyond* time. It begins at the end of history, on the day of resurrection. You don't need to do it all or acquire it all now.

But we can get little glimpses of eternity today. Like Abraham and Sarah, we can see it from afar. When folks have a near death experience, and they return to tell the tale, they've seen that homeland from afar. When folks have a mystical experience, and they're caught-up in something or some place beyond themselves, and for a split second their lives are transfused by love and joy and peace and light, they've seen that homeland from afar. When you're in love, and you spend a wondrous day with your beloved, you lose all sense of time, and you're caught up for at least that day in a little bit of eternity, and you've seen your homeland from afar. And the object of your affection doesn't have to be a person. Maybe it's a hobby, or maybe it's a trail. A walk in the woods can be an occasion for tasting eternity, and seeing your homeland from afar.

Dare to trust eternity. Along with being aware and being prepared, this is how you can begin to live the resurrection life that is promised to us in Jesus Christ. The trick is to not hang on to anything too tightly. As the Risen Lord says to Mary, "Do not hold on to me." Instead, Jesus suggests, *follow* me. The time to hold on and stay put is not yet here. We have a homeland to seek. We have a kingdom to seek. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and *all* these things will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33). Amen.