

“Seeds, Saviors and Something New Bursting Forth!”

C Easter Sunday; Luke 24:1-12

April 21, 2019; 10:00 am

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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Looking for the Living One in a Cemetery

24 ¹⁻³ At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus.

⁴⁻⁸ They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, “Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?” Then they remembered Jesus' words.

⁹⁻¹¹ They left the tomb and broke the news of all this to the Eleven and the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them kept

telling these things to the apostles, but the apostles didn't believe a word of it, thought they were making it all up.

¹² But Peter jumped to his feet and ran to the tomb. He stooped to look in and saw a few grave clothes, that's all. He walked away puzzled, shaking his head.

I. YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD.....

You might have heard the story this way – this account that Donna/Jean just read. From the tales of the women traipsing with burial spices to the tomb that morning...and then you might have heard the end of that story about the men disciples not believing them, and then Peter having to go look for himself, and then see, later, if *he* was believed.

Or, you might have heard the story told from one of the other gospel accounts – Mary alone in the Garden, perhaps. And, you might have heard how she mistook Jesus for the Gardener.

But you might not have heard it from the eyes, ears, and heart of another one of “all the other women.” Martha of Bethany might have told the story of Jesus' life, message, death and coming to life again *this* way.....

One Last Act of Caring, by Lorna King, UCCAN
Long ago and far away, in a little village called Bethany, not very far from the great city of Jerusalem, lived a family. There was a brother, Lazarus and two

sisters, Mary and Martha. They were grown-up now, but they still lived together in a tidy little house.

Life had changed for Lazarus and Mary and Martha when they met their friend Jesus. Jesus was a teacher, travelling from town to town telling people about God, telling them how to live together, telling them to change their lives. Jesus was a good friend and he often stayed at their house.

Martha and some of the others began to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for. The Christ, the one chosen by God to save the people. Everyone was excited and hopeful, looking forward to the kingdom of God that Jesus preached about. But then Jesus started talking about how he was going to die. And when he and his followers went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival -- it happened. He was arrested and hung on a cross to die.

That had been on Friday. Now, on the third day, the Sunday, Martha sat at home alone. Lazarus had not come home since that awful day, Friday. And Mary had been so upset last night that she couldn't sleep. Mary got up long before dawn to walk into Jerusalem. She took some spices and perfumed oils to anoint Jesus' body. She would meet with some of the other women followers to go to the tomb.

Sad, lonely, and broken-hearted, Martha kept working. She was so tired her hands fumbled as she finished the stitching on the quilted sleeping rug. She had been making that rug for their favorite guest, Jesus. And

now he was dead. The rug didn't matter anymore. But at least the sewing filled the emptiness. Jesus was dead! The disciples and the other followers had scattered in fear. Fear of the authorities who might come looking for Jesus' followers, to kill them too. And what about this kingdom of God that Jesus had told them about? Where was this kingdom of love and peace and justice now?

As Martha worked, her thoughts became darker and angrier. She hated all of Jesus' enemies, everyone who had killed him. Her sewing dropped to her lap, her hands clenched in fists of anger. Her thoughts were filled with rage. Then a strange thing happened. Like a tiny light in the darkness of her angry mind, came a voice. Jesus' voice. The voice she thought she would never hear again, spoke quietly within her mind: "**Love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you.**"

No one was near, but with the sound of that inner voice, Martha's anger melted away. "Look at me, raging at those who didn't understand Jesus. Trying to get rid of my pain with anger at them. Have I forgotten everything Jesus taught?"

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Who could it be? The authorities? A message from Lazarus? No, it was her neighbor, Matthew. That useless, good-for-nothing Matthew. Always going off for weeks at a time, leaving his family to find food as best they could. Martha wanted to close the door, but Matthew was desperate. "My wife is very ill. Our four little ones

have no one to care for them. Can't you please help us?" As Martha tried to decide, she seemed to hear Jesus' voice again: **"Whenever you do this for one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you do it for me."**

Martha worked for several hours, caring for the sick woman, feeding and cuddling the children, cleaning the untidy house. As she left, Matthew thanked her and promised to try harder to care for his family.

As Martha walked home, pushing her hair back out of her eyes, a stone went whizzing past her and across the path to hit a mangy street dog that howled in pain. "Joel again! Why doesn't someone do something about that child?" She turned to look at the boy, dirty, skinny, dressed in rags. With no home and no parents, he survived by begging in the market.

At first Joel edged away, ready to duck the slap he expected Martha to give him. When Martha didn't hit him, his hand inched forward to beg. Again Martha could hear the voice in her mind. **"Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** Joel could hardly believe his ears when Martha said, "Wait here. I'll bring you something to eat and drink."

When Martha returned with the small loaf of barley bread and a jug of water, she thought Joel had run away; he wasn't where she had left him. What a surprise! Joel had coaxed the poor injured dog to come

close and he was gently wrapping its bleeding leg with a piece of cloth torn off his ragged tunic.

"Happy are the merciful," said the well-loved voice. Perhaps there was still hope for the kingdom. Martha's face shone with hope as she said to Joel, "Come to my home tonight, child; we have room and you can sleep on my new **rug.**"

Martha's happiness seemed to grow as she headed home. "JESUS IS NOT DEAD!" she thought. "How can he be dead when people hear his voice and hurry to act as he would want? Jesus is alive, just like he said. Jesus is with us still."

At the door stood her sister, Mary. Just like Martha, her sorrow had vanished. Mary ran to greet her sister, her face glowing with happiness. "Martha, Martha! I've seen him! Jesus has risen to new life. Just as he said he would. I met him in the garden at sunrise. He told me to tell the disciples and all his friends. Jesus is alive! Oh, Martha, do you believe me? Please say you do!"

"I do believe you, Mary. I haven't seen him, but I've heard his voice and I know that he is still with us."

Together the sisters went into the house -- the house where they had laughed and talked with their special friend and teacher. For two bleak days, the house had held only sadness and memories. Now the house was filled with happiness and with the sense of being close to Jesus again.

II. ANOTHER VOICE ECHOING JESUS

A young man I know, a few years after Martha of Bethany, was an eye-witness to a crucifixion. He didn't know Jesus in the flesh, as Martha did, but he did know him as a dear friend and teacher, nonetheless. Jesus' wise words had made an imprint on his life, as he grew up in the church and had the seed planted from an early age.

He is actually *not* so young now. His name is Patrick Ireland, and his own, very personal account of death all around, his own near-death and being raised to life again happened twenty years ago this day and many days after.

Patrick is the young man who was seen the world over falling out of the windows at Columbine High School, trying to escape after he'd been shot in the head on that fateful day that we will never forget.

He called his pastor and parents to his hospital bedside a few days after the shootings. His pastor, Steve Poos-Benson tells what happened next in a hushed tone of awe, for it was a holy moment.

*“His head was wrapped in cotton gauze and bandages. His face and eyes were swollen. Language was difficult for him. He looked at us and said, **“Forgive them, please forgive them.”**”*

*Mother Kathy said, “Why should I forgive them?”
Patrick responded,*

“Because they didn't know what they were doing.”

Pastor Steve remembers: “I was silent. This young man had been shot in the head twice. Bullet fragments were embedded in his skull. His foot was torn apart. Two crazed teenagers had murdered his friends and tried to do the same to him. Yet he spoke the most profound words I had ever heard.”
(From “Sent to Soar” by Rev. Stephen Poos-Benson)

III. PLANT SEEDS

Jesus planted seeds. And those seeds, in words and actions would resound through the world and down through time, and they changed lives! Jesus still does.

You might have heard those seeds echoing out in your own life. Might find them to be gentle reminders, like Martha did, when tempted to respond in a less-than-loving way to others, to annoyances, to interruptions.

What echoes in *your* head this Easter morning that Jesus taught you? If you were Martha of Bethany or Patrick of Columbine, what would come out of you in profound ways that Jesus planted there?

What echoes in *you* on this day that is all about new life, new possibilities, new growth? What seeds have been planted within you that now begin to burst out of the soil and spring into life?

You might have heard or seen this just today:
“Within every ending is the seed of a new beginning”
(Danielle Barlow) (Look at your bulletin insert)

That is Resurrection! That is Easter. That is what we celebrate on this glorious day! Endings, death, loss of hope, burial. And the...life again! *New* life. Life bursting forth from where it was buried – sometimes quite unexpectedly!

You are a seed, *too*. Your very life is a seed that is planted by God and awaits coming to life, to birth and burst forth, upward, through the dirt, into the light of day. Toward the Light of the World—the Son and the Sun both!

We’ve journeyed all through Lent asking the question of Sacred Identity: who am I? Who are you? You are a seed, planted by your Creator, called forth to blossom and bloom, and to live your new life planting seeds in and for others. So, plant a seed! In the ground. In someone’s heart. Plant an idea that could bloom into something glorious.

Where can you plant a seed of forgiveness?
“Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.” Is anything more profound or more challenging?

Patrick Ireland, echoing Jesus, planted a seed that day from his hospital bed. His parents and pastor went on to struggle with that plea, and worked hard in the community to help others do what Jesus would do. And they met many challenges along the way!

One day, Pastor Steve was asked to comfort and then lead the memorial service for Eric Harris’ Grandmother. He found himself in the midst, once again, of a broken, hurting, shunned family—this time from the other side of the horror – but with so many, many similarities.

Eric’s family asked him a question. “Is our son in hell? Can God ever forgive our son, grandson, nephew, Eric Harris, Columbine Killer? And Steve remembered those words of Patrick’s that planted a seed echoing Jesus, and he assured them that no, God would not send their child to hell, and that he knew in the depths of his being, that God forgave him and Dylan Klebold and that God forgave them *all*.

IV. IT MIGHT BE FOR YOU AND ME

It might be that Easter is not just about Jesus Christ dying for our sins so that *we* can be forgiven. But, that Jesus, in dying and rising out of the tomb where others would have him stay, that he showed *us* how to forgive those who harm and kill, and rise up to show them—and us all—a better way. A *new* way of life.

“Within every ending is the seed of a new beginning”
Take this home. Color it or hang it on your fridge, There’s a colored one on the CUCC Facebook page and or ask me to send you one. Take this thought with you as you go—into your Easter celebration today and tomorrow and the next day.

What is being planted in you that is the seed of a new beginning? Where are the needs of others calling out for you to plant seeds of real help, comfort, forgiveness?

God gives a promise, on this day, and every day. Of our very lives being seeds and having unending promise and purpose.

It may be “yet unrevealed” but as sure as seeds burst forth through the soil, and Jesus Christ came out of that tomb and overcame death to declare new life for all, we are also raised, promised and propelled on this Easter Morning into *new* life! Amen.