**Shazam!**

**Text: Luke 24:1-12**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

**April 21, 2019**

**Easter Sunday**

At the entrance to the Church of All Nations, next to the Garden of Gethsemane, in Jerusalem, there is a sign that says: NO EXPLANATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH.

The author of a recent Christian Century article notes: “This was intended to discourage talkative tour guides from disturbing the church’s prayerful ambience with shouted lectures, but it has always struck me as very good advice for preachers on Easter Sunday.”

“NO EXPLANATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH.” Not on this Sunday, anyway. You’ve heard those sermons before, I’m sure: “Three reasons why I believe in the Resurrection.” I’ve preached a few myself. Of course, there’s a time and a place to try to explain all manner of things within the Church; a time and a place to bring reason to bear on all sorts of biblical affairs. We are called, after all, to love God with all of our minds, as well as our hearts and souls.

So, yes, there’s a time and a place to explain things. But this isn’t one of them. Because, in the final analysis, resurrection isn’t supposed to be explained; it’s supposed to be *experienced*. You can’t explain new life. You can talk about it; you can tell stories about it; but you can’t explain it. It’s kind of like what Louis Armstrong said about jazz: “If you have to *ask* what jazz is, you’ll never know.” Some things just have to be experienced: jazz, love, life, new life, resurrected life!

The women at the tomb experienced new life that Easter morning. They thought their lives were over. They’d placed so much hope on this man Jesus, and now that he was gone, they felt that they no longer had a reason to live either. But duty called, the body had to be anointed, so they made their way to the tomb that early morning, like the walking dead.

And then…Well, you know the story: the stone had been rolled away, they went inside the tomb, but the body was not there. The scripture says, “They were *perplexed* by this” (Luke 24:4). Well yeah, I guess so! *Totally freaked out* would be more like it! Then two men “in dazzling clothes” stood beside them. And the women went from being freaked out to being *terrified*. So far this story isn’t going too well.

But wait a minute: we’ve heard about men appearing in dazzling clothes before. It happened at the Transfiguration, when Jesus’ clothes became “dazzling white,” and Moses and Elijah appeared similarly “in glory” (Luke 9:29-31). Is it possible that here again we have Moses and Elijah, this time at the Empty Tomb? That’s what Pastor Helen and I got to thinking as we reflected together on this story. I’ve always assumed that these two dudes were angels. But Luke doesn’t say that. And the Transfiguration is the only other place where he has some of his characters putting on this “razzle dazzle.” And, these two guys remind the women of what Jesus said in Galilee; how “the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again” (Luke 24:7). Well, guess what, folks? One of the times when Jesus told that to his disciples was just before the Transfiguration (see Luke 9:21-22). So maybe what’s happening here is that these two guys, Moses and Elijah, come out of the past and tell the women about what’s happening now. And as they tell this story of what happened in Galilee, how Jesus said that he would be crucified and raised, the women “remember his words” (Luke 24:8). That is, they remember Jesus’ words. And suddenly, they believe. *Shazam!* The prophets tell their story and the women experience new life. Out of the past comes a story, a *powerful* story, but new life is experienced *now*; resurrection is experienced *now*.

And I do mean *now*, on April 21, 2019. Easter does not commemorate a past event, it proclaims a present reality. Christ the Lord is risen *today*!

The story alone is sufficient. The Word alone is sufficient. The women haven’t yet *seen* the Risen Lord. They are convinced by Jesus’ *words*, as retold by these two prophets. And then, they tell all of Jesus’ followers the good news.

There is power in the Word. There is power in story. There is power especially in *this* story. And in our stories. It’s like Easter morning my junior year in college. I’d taken my first religion course that winter and I’d read most of the New Testament for the first time in my life. I mean, I grew-up in the Church; this shouldn’t have been new stuff for me. But it was. At the age of 20 I’d finally cracked open the Bible and read it. I read all sorts of amazing stories; including, of course, the Resurrection stories. I read Jesus’ words. I heard Jesus’ words. I remembered Jesus’ words. And I believed.

So that Easter morning, I was pumped! I was home for spring break. Waited until 8 am. Then I pulled out Dad’s recording of Messiah, put on the Hallelujah Chorus, and I *cranked* it! *Shazam!*

I don’t know that I raised the dead, but I raised my sister. She was sleeping in the next room. Emphasis on *was*. When you experience new life, you have to share it. When you experience resurrection, you have to tell people about it. Resurrection happens when stories of new life are told. There is power in these stories. There is power in *your* story. We have to tell our stories.

What story do you have to tell? I know you have some. You, and folks in many other churches much like this one. I’ve heard stories about how God has raised folks from the death of addiction. I’ve heard stories about how God has raised folks from the depth of despair. I’ve heard stories about how God has raised folks from the bitter pain of broken relationships. In every church that I’ve ever served, including this one, I’ve heard stories of resurrection. And there is power in these stories. There is power in your story!! Your stories have brought hope to me. They have brought new life to me. So we need to tell them to each other. And we need to tell them to folks out there; folks who rarely find their way inside a church. If you’ve experienced resurrection, you need to tell your story.

Like the story that we can tell about new life out at Camp Bedford. It’s the story that many of you already know; about how 50 people showed-up for the Work Day earlier this month. Not just the usual 4 or 5, but 50 people; mostly from other churches in southern Indiana. Don Mains called it a miracle. And it was. New life is always a miracle; an in-breaking, out of the blue, of something that is totally unexpected. 50 people. The Friends of Camp Bedford. That’s a concept that we just dreamed-up last fall. And all of a sudden, it’s reality! Someone said that the Camp has not looked this good, this early, in years! *Shazam!* It’s a harbinger of things to come. It’s the first fruits of the new life that is coming to our Camp, our congregation, and our community: as the big, old stone is blasted away from the tomb-like existence that has afflicted us for too long. The Risen Christ is alive in this place!

And when that new life smacks up against the big, old stones that need to be rolled away in your lives…when those stones are blasted away…then raise your voices in joyous song; raise your hands in joyous praise; raise your eyes and gaze upon the light and the life that are breaking into our midst. And then tell people about it. We have to tell our stories!

And if you’re in the midst of death right now – because, of course, sometimes even on Easter, death has a way of trying to crash the party – if you’re in the midst of death right now, you need to *listen* to those stories. And you need to hang on to the hope that this is not the end. Many’s the time that I’ve heard someone say, “My life is over.” They’ve lost a loved one, or they’ve made some major mistake, or for whatever reason it feels like their life has fallen apart. I’ve heard people say, “My life is over;” only to then watch them in the coming months, or the coming years, as they’ve discovered, “Oh my goodness, my life isn’t over after all; because they’ve experienced *new* life.

We know not what form new life will take; we know only that it *will* come. Resurrection will come because Jesus has been raised. Resurrection will come because Moses and Elijah and the saints of every age and place will stand next you; they will come alongside you and bear you up when you think that all your strength is gone; and out of the blue the totally unexpected will happen. *Shazam!* Because that’s the way life works. That’s the way God works. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us,” Paul says. Because, “if God is for us, who is against us?” It is Christ Jesus who died, yes; but also, it is Christ Jesus who was raised, who is seated at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us. And nothing can separate us from the Risen Christ. Nothing can separate us from his love. “For I am *sure*,” Paul says, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our [Risen] Lord” (see Romans 8:18-38). *Shazam!* Amen!!