

Astounding Women
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Luke 24:1-12

The setting is Easter morning. Hear now the word of God:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] 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.

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This ends our official reading for today, but we’re actually going to focus on verse 22. What happens between the passage we just read and verse 22 is the text I

preached on two weeks ago here in Morningsong: the Road to Emmaus. You'll remember that two disciples were walking the 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, when a stranger came upon them and joined them in walking and talking. That stranger turned out to be the risen Lord, but the disciples did not recognize him. Jesus asked them why they were so sad, and they explained how their savior had died on Friday. And then in verse 22 they told Jesus, "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us." (Luke 24:22) They were referring to earlier that morning when the women had told them about the empty tomb, meaning the Lord had risen. However, they had not believed the women. And so at this point, Jesus calls them foolish and slow of heart. My guess is that Jesus might have even interjected, "Guys, for heaven's sake, have you not learned the life lesson yet that the women are always right?" And then he went on to interpret all the scriptures to them about himself.

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, so many times we are like these disciples, foolish and slow of heart when it comes to recognizing and understanding you. We pray that you will open our eyes and minds and hearts this morning, that we might hear your word for us today. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Sermon

I am grateful that this has been a fun weekend with astounding women for me. Yesterday I spent most of the day at mother/daughter day camp with my 6-year old's Daisy troop. We worked on badges, played games and roasted marshmallows. It was a lovely time where the other moms and I were able to watch our kindergarten girls become little leaders before our eyes. I also spent time at the Women's Build day for our Interfaith Habitat house. We got to meet and pray for the female volunteers and the homeowner and her children. It was a lot of fun painting the inside of the house while laughing and sharing stories. As an added bonus to this awesome day, I also got to hear one of my favorite songs on the radio while driving from place to place. You'll find out what it is at the end.

Interestingly enough, this kind of day of service among women was the original idea behind Mother's Day. You see, Mother's Day began over 100 years ago with a campaign led by Anna Jarvis, a young lady who wanted a way to honor her deceased mother, who had founded Mothers' Day Work Clubs. These were gatherings where mothers of all backgrounds would join forces and come together to improve conditions within their communities. During the Civil War, it was this band of women who saw beyond the gray and blue—medically treating, feeding and clothing both Union and Confederate soldiers with neutrality. So in honor of her own mother and other women, Anna promoted the adoption of Mother's Day as a national holiday for over 6 years until President Woodrow Wilson (*a Presbyterian I might add*) finally made it an official holiday in 1914.¹

¹ "Anna Jarvis." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Jarvis

However, no sooner than the holiday became official, it became fairly commercialized—turning it into one that felt like it was all about consumeristic gifts, and not about the service day of mothers working together and honoring one another for which Anna had dreamed. She was so distraught with this distortion of her idea of Mother’s Day, that less than 10 years after its inception, she began campaigning against the very holiday she had helped establish. Of course, as we know, this national holiday was never reversed. And I for one, love the reason behind her establishment of Mother’s Day, but I’m also not overly sad about the modern day addition of flowers and brunches. And I definitely love the idea of honoring mothers and motherly figures.

In the church, Mother’s Day does not appear on any liturgical calendar, yet it is widely acknowledged that mothers and women in general have played a tremendous part in our faith. Just look around this room. Imagine if all of the women weren’t here today. And furthermore, imagine if all the men who had to be encouraged by the women to be here, didn’t show up. I would dare say women are the backbone of our faith communities. Women have played an important role since the beginning of time. From Eve in Genesis to Mary in the Gospels, from Miriam in Exodus to Phoebe in Romans, from Deborah in Judges to Priscilla in Acts. The list goes on: Ester, Ruth, Naomi, Rebekah, Leah, Hannah... and many more, including those who played large roles in our faith but remained unnamed by the historians and scribes.

Today in our passage we meet a group of women who astounded the disciples with the news of the empty tomb. These strong, astounding women were loyal, faithful friends to Jesus. Luke tells us that as Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha, these

women walked beside him, weeping and wailing in sadness. This same group stood at the foot of the cross long after the crowds who had gathered simply to watch the spectacle left. These women were doing what astounding women of all times have done—they were doing it all.

They were helping in all ways possible, putting the needs of others before their own. That evening they went with Joseph of Arimathea to lay Jesus' body in the tomb. Then they went home after a physically and emotionally exhausting day to prepare the spices and ointments to take to the tomb to treat his body. They likely stayed up until the wee hours of the morning in their preparation, because they knew they had to get their work done before the dawning of the Sabbath. They honored their faith traditions. Even though I'm sure their hearts yearned to go care for the body of their beloved friend, they stayed at home on the Sabbath. Although I wouldn't doubt if they at least snuck a prayer visit and a casserole over to the family of Jesus. Luke tells us that early at dawn the next day—the very first opportunity they had—they visited the tomb. These dedicated women were the last to leave the cross and the first to visit the tomb. And so they were the first to tell the world about Christ's resurrection.

This group of women was astounding. It was diverse group of women who first learned the news of Jesus' resurrection. One had co-habitated with seven demons, two were honored wives of village fishermen, one was the wife of a top official in Herod's household, and others had sufficient enough money to hire servants to do their household chores while they wandered with Jesus and the twelve. Their unity in diversity embodied what Jesus considered family of faith. Embalming was normally the task of the blood relatives, yet not one of these women was

biologically related to Jesus.² Christ was family to them, and so they went to take care of his body.

These women were perplexed by the empty tomb until the angels reminded them of Jesus' very own words that he would rise from the dead on the third day. They were immediately enlightened and moved into full clarity of the depth of the meaning of the empty tomb. God chose this motley crew of women to be the first bearers of the most poignant, pivotal moment in our faith story—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Elated, they rushed from the tomb to share the joyous news with the apostles that Jesus was alive!

Luke underscores the faithfulness of their testimony by noting that the women announced all these things, including what they had observed, what they had been told, and the new significance they attributed to Jesus' death and resurrection.³ And yet, after all this, Luke reports that the men just dismissed the women's account as an idle tale. One man, namely Peter—still not fully believing but curious enough by their report—decided to walk to the tomb to check it out for himself. But it seems all the others just continued to stay where they were and wallow in their own grief.

It was in that state that Jesus met the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus, and you know how the story unfolds. After walking and talking for 7 miles together, but not yet recognizing him, they invited this stranger into their home,

² Saunders, Ross. *Outrageous Women Outrageous God: Women in the First Two Generations of Christianity*. (Australia, E.J. Dwyer, 1996), 65.

³ Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 839.

and as they broke bread together, their eyes were finally opened so that they recognized the risen Lord. And then, as quickly as he had appeared, Jesus vanished. The disciples immediately walked the 7 miles back to Jerusalem to proclaim to the apostles the exact same news the women had shared earlier that morning, “Friends, the Lord has risen indeed!”

Now, can you imagine what the women were thinking? They were probably sitting in the back of the room, shaking their heads in astonishment, throwing their hands in the air, and saying, “Guys, are you kidding—this is exactly what we told you this very morning!”

In history, there are far too many times when women’s voices have not been believed or even heard. I can only imagine how many *un*-recorded scenes of women’s hands being thrown up the air have happened over the last several thousand years. But today, on this Mother’s Day, we celebrate and recognize the voices of astounding women—those saints who have come before us and formed our faith, and those who walk and serve among us now, proclaiming that Christ is risen indeed, inspiring us to live into this new life every day.

It is important to pause and acknowledge that Mother’s Day is not a day of celebration for everyone. There are some who have lost their mothers or children to illness and death, some who have never had an easy relationship with their mothers, some who long to be mothers but struggle with infertility or finding the right mate, and some who have chosen not to be mothers. This can be a day of extreme celebrations for some, while a time of extreme loneliness for others. So

today we will celebrate not only mothers, but strong women in general. Astounding women who are the backbone of our community of faith.

It makes me think of Maggy Barankitse from Burundi, who during their civil war in the 1990s, witnessed horrific acts of genocide.⁴ On the night of October 24, 1993, she saw 72 people killed, including her best friend Juliette whose last words to Maggy were “Please educate my children like your own. Give them love.” And even though Maggy had already adopted 7 children, both Tutsi and Hutu, at that point, she took on these two as her own as well. And then she saved 25 more. It was that fateful night that Maggy realized that her mission would be to fight the violence ravaging her country by giving the children of her country an alternative to hate. Hers would be a mission of peace and love, in which the life and dignity of every human being would be respected.⁵

Out of this horrific experience of death and destruction, came her beautiful calling in life. A calling to not only to save children, but to proclaim the gospel message of love, raising a new generation in her country without hate and bitterness. She says love made her an inventor. So she created Maison Shalom, meaning “house of peace”, which is a place for Burundi’s orphans to survive and thrive. Yet Maggy insists that despite its mission to aid children, Maison Shalom is not an orphanage. First and foremost, she says, it is a story about God’s love. A place where children can be raised with a vision of love and God’s abundance.

⁴ https://www.faithandleadership.com/multimedia/love-made-me-inventor?utm_source=conceptpage&utm_medium=resource&utm_campaign=traditionedinnovation

⁵ <http://www.maisonshalom.org/en/241/maggy-and-maison-shalom>

She says that as Christians we are not only to go to church and pray, but that we are to give back dignity to others. She says we can give clothes and feed others, but that if they have no dignity, then these mean nothing. Furthermore, she insists that her children live full, rich lives. This is why she built a movie theater and a pool for the kids to enjoy. Because she wants them to not only survive, but to thrive and dream like other children around the world. She talks about how the swimming pool serves not only as a place of fun, but a reminder of baptism, a washing away of sins. The pool sits on what had been a killing field during the war. Now it's a place of love and hope and joy. Maison Shalom is a place of resurrection, which over 24 years has expanded into a sustainable institution that has helped over 30,000 orphans. If you click on the Maison Shalom website today, you will be greeted with pictures of smiling children, with the tagline "Love has prevailed." Maggy celebrated her 60th birthday last year. She is an astounding woman of faith, a spiritual mother who has impacted generations to come in her community.

She and so many women like her are the reason that microloan organizations around the world prioritize lending to women. It has been statistically proven that a loan to a woman guarantees community improvement. We reinvest in and take care of our people, be it our immediate family, church family, or community. Just like the astounding women at the tomb that first Easter morning. Just like Anna Jarvis and her mother. Just like Maggy Barankitse. Just like the astounding women in your life.

I love that we are celebrating communion today on Mother's Day, because it is the family meal of our Christian faith. The Lord's table is a place where we gather

together and all divisions dissipate. Where our value and dignity is fully rooted in Christ. Where we come together as a community in communion. And what more could a mother's heart desire than to have her children gathered in unity at the table?

Friends, this Mother's Day is the perfect opportunity for us to celebrate and tell not only our mothers, but all the astounding women in our lives how much we love and appreciate them. It's the smart thing to do. Not only because mother always knows best, which is true of course, but because if you're smart, you'll also believe the what a wise, award-winning musician once uttered in that favorite song of mine: "Who runs the world? Girls!"⁶

*All praise, honor and glory be to God our Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer,
Amen.*

⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Run_the_World_\(Girls\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Run_the_World_(Girls))

