

SERMON

+ Resurrection of Our Lord C

April 20, 2025

I can't read Luke's Easter story of the empty tomb
without getting caught by the very first word, "But."

It's a very simple word, of course,
and it usually doesn't have
such a place of prominence as it does here.

It's only a conjunction, as you know,
that links two contrary thoughts,
setting one against the other,
where the second thought
upsets the expectations we had
that were based on the first thought.

"This is true, but so is that."

"This big thing happened, but no one even noticed."

"You're a good neighbor,
but your dog dug a hole in my yard."

Our Gospel reading today
is the second part of the contrast,
and that "but" indicates that this second part
contradicts the expectations we had
from what had come before.

This story we read today begins with "But,"
and the word continues to show up throughout the story,
as the first word in the telling of most of the important events
of the resurrection story.

As if the whole story is a contradiction.

What had come before, of course,
was last week's story
that ended with, "He breathed his last."
Jesus died and was buried.
The funeral was over and everyone went home.

The End.

But Luke goes on.

“But,” is the beginning of a new chapter.

And Luke tells a sentence, a paragraph, a whole story
that doesn't follow naturally
from what we learned before.

Jesus' dead body was wrapped in a linen cloth
and he was laid in a rock-hewn tomb.
But they found the stone rolled away.
But when they went in
they did not find the body.
But as they were frightened,
two men spoke to them.
“He is not here, BUT has risen.”
They told all this to the eleven apostles.
But it seemed to them an idle tale
and they did not believe.
But Peter got up and ran to the tomb.

Jesus had accomplished his mission
and made it to Jerusalem
to die like the prophets of God.
"He breathed his last"
But, that was not the End after all.
But wait, there's more!

From the depths of the darkness of the tomb,
God defeats death itself
by sending his beloved Son there for you.
And then, God shouts, "But!"

And that single, simple word changes everything
for Christ,
and for you.

Death and sin, suffering and grief,
division and vengeance,
surround us and permeate us.

We are overcome with the powers of the world,
we suffer illness and disease,
we are lonely or anxious.

But by the same power and mercy
that shouted "But" from the depths of death for Jesus,
God shouts "But!" for you

"But" says God,
death is defeated,
Christ is risen,
and in the promise of your baptism,
you are united to Christ in his death
so that you may also be united with him
in the resurrection from death.

"But" says God,
death is defeated,
Christ is risen,
and by the waters of baptism, God declares, you are my child;
you are forgiven and saved.

"But" says God,
death is defeated,
Christ is risen,
and you are united with Christ
and the community of believers
in love and support,
fellowship, healing, and peace.

"But" says God,
death is defeated,
Christ is risen,
and by God's loving mercy,
you are brought into the new thing God is doing –
the new creation in Christ.

If there's one word you can take home with you today –
besides Alleluia, of course –

to keep the flavor of today's celebration
and the event of the resurrection alive for you,
it's "but".

The resurrection of Jesus
is a big shout from God, "But!"
It continues the story long after "The End."

Picture it on a tombstone:
Born, followed by the date.
Died, followed by the date.
And below that, "But!",
proclaiming a new creation, new life, resurrected life.

It's God's little unexpected Easter word
that bring joy out of grief and life out of death –
shouted from the depths of death,
and shouted for you,
"But!"

Alleluia!
Christ is risen.
You are risen.
We are risen.
The world is risen!
Thanks be to God!