



VILLAGE
CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

The Practice of Rising

SCRIPTURE:
Luke 24:
13-32

March 31, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

I love this story. Of all the stories about Jesus' resurrection, this is my favorite. To set it up, it is Sunday morning and several women have gone to the tomb where they laid Jesus' body on Friday night. When they get there, the large stone covering the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away. They go into the tomb and find no body. Then two men in dazzling white clothes appear—messengers from God (angels)—and they ask the women, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” And they tell them that Jesus is not here. He has risen from the dead. And the two figures remind the women of all that Jesus had said to them, how he had predicted his death and on the third day he would rise again. And the women run back to tell the other disciples but the disciples do not believe them because, well, after all, they're just women and you know how they can be—all 'emotional.' So Peter goes by himself and runs to the tomb, which is typical of us men—we need to verify and see things for ourselves. And surprise! He finds everything just as the women had said. The gospel writer Luke says Peter goes home 'amazed.'

Then the scene shifts and we are with two other followers of Jesus who are walking to Emmaus, a town seven miles from Jerusalem. They just heard the claims of the women about the empty tomb and Peter's endorsement of what had happened. They do not know what to make of all of it and while they are walking and talking, Jesus himself comes up to walk with them but the scripture says their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Then the stranger innocently asks these two what they're talking about and Cleopas—the only one of the pair who is named—responds. This leads us to suspect that the other disciple is a woman because women in this patriarchal society were not often viewed as important enough to be named. And if it were two men, we would

have both of their names. Cleopas asks the stranger (Jesus), incredulously, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these days?” It's the equivalent of, “Where have you been?” or “Have you been hiding under a rock, buddy?”

So at this point, I think Jesus is starting to play with them because he asks them, “What things?” And they tell him: This guy, Jesus of Nazareth, that we have been following. Everyone knows about him. I don't know how you cannot have heard about him. He was a teacher and he performed miracles and there was this wedding and he turned water to wine and there was this time when a whole bunch of people were hungry and we only found five loaves of bread and two fish and he did something and there was a lot of food—like it came out of nowhere. And, oh, tell him about the storm! Yeah, this one time, we were on the Sea of Galilee and there was a storm and he came out walking on the water. No, seriously, walking *on* the water and he made the storm stop. And then we came to Jerusalem and he was arrested and tortured and he died—like really died—and we were shocked and sad. And then this morning some women from our group went to the tomb and his body was gone. Really!

And then Jesus gets annoyed because he says to them, “Oh, how foolish you are,” which is Bible code for, “You idiots!” which is not very nice but you know, Jesus has been through a lot in the last 72 hours so he's kind of allowed. And then, starting all the way from Moses, he interprets how all that has happened is part of God's unfolding plan and they get it. They see how all of this is about God's love for all of creation.

By now they have arrived at Emmaus. Jesus pretends like he is going farther and they beg him to stay and he does. They sit down together for dinner

and he takes bread and blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them and in that moment, they recognize him. You see the connection to the last supper just four days earlier, right? These two must have been there in that room. And right then, Jesus vanishes from their sight. And they say to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road and while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Now be careful. I don’t think it means that talking with Jesus gives you heartburn. But rather it means that encountering the risen Christ stirs our hearts—changes our hearts, even strengthens our hearts, to become more like Christ’s own heart.

Several years ago I was going to speak at a conference center in Mo-Ranch, a Presbyterian conference center in the hill country of central Texas. To get there, they had me fly into San Antonio and rent a car. As I was driving there, I was listening to the public radio station in San Antonio and the reporter talked about a mother, Elsa, and her son Daniel. She and Daniel had come to the U.S. from Mexico when Daniel was 3 years old. They came to escape an abusive husband and father. Elsa worked two jobs and they were able to make a life here. Daniel excelled at school and athletics. At the time, he was a junior in high school and already there were rumors of scholarship offers for college. After school and practice, Daniel had a part-time job at a grocery store to help his mom pay bills.

He was working late on a Friday night and Elsa had fallen asleep. She woke up with a start and looked at the clock and realized it was almost 2 a.m. and she thought it odd that Daniel was not yet home. Then she got the call that no parent ever wants to receive. Daniel had gotten into an accident while driving home. The officer said she needed to come to the hospital right away. So Elsa called a friend because Daniel had their one car and her friend took her to the hospital. She was met by an officer who explained that it looked like Daniel might have fallen asleep while he was driving home. Then a physician explained that Daniel had suffered major brain trauma. His body seemed to be okay but they could not detect any brain activity.

Elsa went into the room and found her beautiful, handsome son there. She said it looked like he was

asleep. She begged them to do anything they could and over the next two days they tried, but Daniel was gone even though his body was still strong.

After talking with her priest, Elsa decided it was best to turn off all the machines. Before she did that, a social worker met with her and asked her gently about organ donation. Elsa remembered a few years earlier when she and Daniel were watching television that a news story had come on about that and Daniel had said to her that he thought that was a good thing and he would want to do that. It turns out that Daniel was able to help several people and it brought some comfort to Elsa.

A year after his death Elsa was still wrapped in grief. She talked with a counselor who suggested it might help if perhaps she learned about those who received organ donations from Daniel. So Elsa reached out to the hospital and they said they could not give to her contact information but they could reach out to the individuals and invite them to contact her. To her surprise, right away, she began to get calls and letters. Elsa met with several people in San Antonio. Each time she took with her photos of Daniel and his letterman’s jacket, baseball glove and baseball cap. She just wanted them to know him. She said it helped her.

Then she received a note from a young man named Michael who lived in Albuquerque who had received Daniel’s heart. And she asked if she could come visit. He said, “of course,” and offered to pay for everything but Elsa refused. About nine months after Daniel’s death, she flew to Albuquerque. There she was met by a tall, handsome young man and his wife and two little girls. They took her to their home and she showed them her photos and the girls wore Daniel’s jacket and played with his baseball glove. She found out that the young man’s heart had been damaged by an infection a few years earlier and without Daniel’s heart, he would not be alive. They all spent a wonderful Saturday together and on Sunday morning, they took Elsa to the airport for her flight home. Just outside the security checkpoint as they were saying goodbye to one another, Michael told Elsa that she was now a part of their family. As Elsa got ready to leave, she turned to Michael and asked him if she could have one last favor. He said, “Elsa, anything.” She said, “I wonder if just once

more, I might listen to the heartbeat of my son.” So he opened his arms and gathered Elsa to him and she pressed her ear to his strong chest and she was surprised at how well she could hear and feel Daniel’s heart. And Elsa’s eyes opened wide and she said, “Oh my. Oh my. It is so strong. My son’s heart beats so strong!”

When the disciples encountered Jesus, the risen Christ, their hearts were stirred. And now, on this Easter Day, that heart, the very heart of Jesus Christ, beats in us. We who are the church, who dare to call

ourselves the body of Christ... the heart of the risen Christ now beats in you and in me—in us all. And it is my fervent prayer that one day, when God says to us, “I wonder if I might have a favor from you. I wonder if I might put my ear to you to listen just one more time for the heartbeat of my son.” I pray that when God says that, God’s own eyes might open wide and God might say, “Oh my. Oh my. It is so strong. My son’s heart beats so strong!”

In the name of the Father and of the risen Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.