

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Easter, April 4, 2010, based on Luke 24:1-12

An Idle Tale

Once upon a time there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes. Before they left, their mother told them "Whatever you do, do it the best that you can because that's the way to get along in the world.

The first little pig built his house out of straw because it was the easiest thing to do. The second little pig built his house out of sticks. This was a little bit stronger than a straw house. The third little pig built his house out of bricks.

One night the big bad wolf, who dearly loved to eat fat little piggies, came along and saw the first little pig in his house of straw. He said "Let me in, Let me in, little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!" "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin", said the little pig. But of course the wolf did blow the house in and the little pig ran away. The wolf then came to the house of sticks. "Let me in, Let me in little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in" "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin", said the little pig. But the wolf blew that house in too, and the second little pig ran away. The wolf then came to the house of bricks. "Let me in, let me in" cried the wolf, "Or I'll huff and I'll puff till I blow your house in" "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin" said the pigs. Well, the wolf huffed and puffed but he could not blow down that brick house. But the wolf was a sly old wolf and he climbed up on the roof to look for a way

into the brick house. The little pig saw the wolf climb up on the roof and lit a roaring fire in the fireplace and placed on it a large kettle of water. When the wolf finally found the hole in the chimney he crawled down and KERSPLASH right into that kettle of water and that was the end of his troubles with the big bad wolf.

The next day the little pig invited his mother over. She said "You see it is just as I told you. The way to get along in the world is to do things as well as you can." Fortunately for that little pig, he learned that lesson. And he lived happily ever after! – An idle tale.

Today in scripture, some followers of Jesus were thought to be telling an idle tale. These followers were women. According to the gospel of Luke, these women had witnessed the crucifixion. They had stood at a distance and watched Jesus die a horrible death on a cross. Crucifixion in those days was done in a public place to humiliate the offender and make them look foolish. The cross was doing its job that Friday long ago, and according to Luke 23, the women who had followed him from Galilee watched these things.

These same women saw where Jesus was buried and prepared spices and ointments as was the custom of the time, and then they rested on Saturday as part of the Jewish Sabbath. Early on Sunday they took the spices and ointments to the tomb, but the stone was rolled away and the body was missing. Jesus was not there!

Suddenly they encountered two men in dazzling light who announced - *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.* Then they took the news back to the apostles, but these words seemed as an idle tale and they did not believe them.

It took the rest of the day, according to Luke, for the new reality of what was happening to sink in. It took awhile for the new thing that God was doing to become part of their reality.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book, *The Last Week*, write this: *Without Easter, we wouldn't know about Jesus. If his story had ended with the crucifixion, he most likely would have been forgotten – another Jew crucified by the Roman Empire in a bloody century that witnessed thousands of such executions. Perhaps a trace of two about him would have shown up in Josephus (the historian) or in Jewish rabbinic sources, but that would have been all. Indeed, without Easter, we wouldn't even have "Good Friday," for there would have been no abiding community to remember and give meaning to his death. So Easter is utterly central.*

Easter is utterly central. As Clement of Alexandria declared: "Jesus has turned all of our sunsets into sunrises." Easter is the game changer. It is the winning basket at the buzzer on a situation that seemed hopeless. Easter is the Hail Mary pass the somehow get caught in the end zone of life. Easter turns night into day, turns defeat into new possibilities, and turns death into resurrection living. The resurrection of Jesus is what makes all the difference! Easter promises new life now and at the hour of

our death. Easter says that because Jesus lives, we will live, and there is always new life. Even when we experience death, there will be new life. This is the good news of our faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, I don't think we truly understand and value the depth of resurrection living until we experience it. Fifteen years ago, my first marriage came to an end concluding a twenty-five year relationship. It was a hard time, and I had to make some decisions for myself and my children. It was an unsettling and uneasy time in my life. It felt like a death, which it was.

But I had a choice, I could have stayed in the tomb of a bad situation or I could hope for new life. My faith in God held out for new life and two years later Nancy came into my life and life has never been better. My trust in the power of new life gave me something solid to stand on when times were hard.

This is the power of trusting in the resurrection because it is not just for the hour of our death but other times in our life as well. There have been several times in my life that I have died to a job or an employment opportunity or to a relationship, and I was bitterly disappointed and in the tomb. But because of my faith in the resurrection power of God through Jesus, I hoped for a better day, and so far I have not been disappointed.

Trusting in the new life God brings is something for all of us. Right now our economy has been through a hard time. It feels like a death in many ways. Many have lost a job or business is poor. Well, we have two

choices. We can stay in the tomb about it, or we can trust in new life and expect a better day. Will it be exactly like it was – probably not, but there will be new life and new possibilities.

Life was not exactly the same for the followers of Jesus after the first Easter. They still had a relationship with Jesus but now in a new form. It was never going to be like it was, but now there was an even better possibility. Resurrection life is like this.

Churches go through times of death and resurrection as well. Programs and ministries that use to be meaningful come to an end, and ministers who have been loved and appreciated take a new call. We can be Good Friday people about it and stay in the tomb, or we can hope in the power of the resurrection and trust that there will be a new day and perhaps even brighter day. It will never be the same, but there will be new life.

New life is what this day is about. Are you ready to trust and put your hope in this idle tale? Idle tales do have important lessons. Take my opening story of the 3 little pigs. Mamma told the 3 little piggies that they needed to do the best they could to get along well in life. Two of the little piggies discovered that they had not done enough to withstand the wolves of life. They had to learn to do better to thrive.

For the young people in attendance today, you may have prepared for a field that is now over crowded or obsolete. You can either stay in despair and stay in the tomb about it, or you can look for new life and new

possibilities so you can thrive. For all of us, the way we did business or related to the world in the past may be changing. We can go to the tomb about it and die, or we can look and pray about new life and trust we will find new possibilities and thrive.

Whether we are 10, 30, 50, 70, or 100, we are always learning how to do things differently, better so that we can thrive and have new life. Otherwise, all there is death and the tomb. So, how is your life? What in your life is life giving and bringing joy? What is dying? What in your life needs resurrection? What needs to die to have a more healthy life? What do you need to pray about as you hope for new possibilities? The resurrection is about new life when something comes to an end.

Today is the day we announce that we are resurrection people not in the tomb people. We are invited to trust and believe in this idle tale. Amen.