

Psalm 121 begins this way:

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
from where will my help come?
- 2 My help comes from Yahweh,
who made heaven and earth!

Indeed, on the mountaintop is where I want to start this Easter sermon, with a flashback to the doorstep of the season of Lent; some 40+ days ago now.

Traditionally, the church calendar will place on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

The Transfiguration marks the midpoint of Jesus' journey teaching the ways of Yahweh. It is the figurative and narrative highpoint. It was there on the mountaintop that the primary disciples of Peter, James, and John were given all the evidence they needed that Jesus was, indeed, the anointed one of God.

For it is during that story that two mystical figures join Jesus, and Jesus's clothes all of a sudden become a dazzling white. It turns out that those figures were none other than the Jewish heroes, Moses and Elijah. More than heroes, really, these two represented all that was meant to help a faithful Jew understand what was required of them, in the words of the song from Godspell, to "see God more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow God more nearly, day by day..." As Pat told us in bible study on Thursday, in Jewish numerology, two is the number that symbolizes "witness." These two bear witness to the one. In that moment, we have a passing of the torch from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant – Jesus is recognized as the Chosen One to carry that message forward to the people.

Before Elijah and Moses fade from the scene, we are told by most bible translations that they were talking with Jesus “about his departure.” But we English speakers miss out on a lot when we don’t have the privilege of reading the Greek in which the New Testament was originally composed. The word used for the topic of conversation between these three messengers of God, was Jesus’ “Exodus.” The departure of Jesus would be akin to the escape his ancient forebears made when they were freed from Egypt. However, instead of “just” being freed from captivity to cruel and overbearing Pharaohs, Jesus’ exodus led to freedom from ANY type of tyranny; and most notably the tyranny of death.

That’s right friends – today we celebrate the Exodus from the plague of death to the joy that comes with digging in and following Jesus. But now we’ve got to find him! In today’s reading, when the stone is rolled away, and the women peer into the tomb, Jesus’ body is missing.

I give a lot of credit to those who followed Jesus along the way – those who trusted in his word; those who endured the agony of his cruel death march to the cross; and, especially *those* women who showed up at the tomb preparing to anoint his body. Much of what Jesus taught them had sunk into their souls. Deeply aggrieved, shocked by this death, and fearful of what might happen to them if they showed they were aligned with him, they courageously engaged with the rituals of grief so they could begin the process of moving on and then eventually live out his teachings.

Preoccupied with all of these feelings, they show up at the tomb, only to find **two mystical figures** in dazzlingly white clothes. We, having been privy to the story

of the Transfiguration, know who these two figures are: Moses and Elijah – back for an encore – back to bear witness to the good news – no, the GREAT news, the UNBELIEVABLE news, the MAKES-ALL-THE-DIFFERENCE-IN-THE-WORLD news – of Jesus’ Exodus from death to life, opening the gate for all who follow his Way.

“Why do you search for the Living One among the dead?” they ask the women. “Jesus is not here; Christ has risen. Remember what Jesus said to you while still in Galilee – 7 that the Chosen One must be delivered into the hands of sinners and be crucified, and on the third day would rise again.”

Luke’s narrator then tells us,

8 With this reminder, the words of Jesus came back to them.

The women seem to take the proclamation in stride. They went on from there to tell the male disciples, who, um, didn’t handle the news so deftly:

“(The women’s testimony) seemed like nonsense and they *refused* to believe them.” (*Ugh, men!*)

“Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. He stooped down, but he could see nothing but the wrappings. So he went away, full of amazement at what had occurred.”

Alright, it seems like Peter’s heart might finally be opening like the Grinch’s, and it is making room for believing what seems absurd. I love the way Luke leaves Peter, by the way. Isn’t that a perfect mirror of us? Going away from this story rather amazed by what occurred and trying to reconcile the truth it pronounces?

I'm going to lean into the idea that the men finally caught up to the women. And that once the news of the resurrection sunk in, I can imagine them being moved to strike up the band ala Psalm 150, which goes like this:

Alleluia!

We praise you, YHWH, in your sanctuary;
we praise you in your mighty skies!

2 We praise you for your powerful deeds;
we praise you for your overwhelming glory!

3 **We praise you with the blast of the trumpet;**
we praise you with lyre and harp!

4 We praise you with timbrel and dance;
we praise you with strings and flute!

5 We praise you with clashing cymbals;
we praise you with resounding cymbals!

6 Let everything that has breath
praise YHWH!

Alleluia!

We are the inheritors of their delight. Easter Sunday is the one Sunday during the year where we are excited to make a joyful noise. We want Mike to crank up the organ; we want Keith to lead a joyous chorus of bells; we want Dan to blast his trumpet. And we're not alone. As we were planning for this service and talking about the additional instruments, Mike was telling us that the word throughout the CWRU music department was that on Easter Sunday, **"Everyone wants a trumpet!"** I guess trumpeters are hard to come by for this weekend. And why not - it's not a time for keeping quiet. It is a time for exuberant praise!

Two Sundays ago I was on the campus of the Dougbe River Presbyterian School of Liberia, in the most out-of-the-way place I've ever been. Here's a picture of the school from [Google Earth](#) (there's actually more to the campus than that now). But while we're zoomed in, I'm going to ask Phil to Zoom out. There is nothing for miles and miles but trees and a few villages, each with maybe 15-20 huts. I was on the campus to celebrate the dedication of a [dormitory](#) that will house 100 girls, giving most the opportunity for an education they wouldn't otherwise have had.

There was a choir that was invited to participate in the celebration. They had come all the way from the nearest city, Zwedru – a roughly 4-5 hour drive, on hard-pack dirt and mud roads – all 20+ of them riding on the back of a flatbed truck. The choir consisted of four drummers, using either canister drums or square ones, all covered by animal hide, three women playing African shakers, and 16 singers/dancers. These folks were the quintessence of a praise band.

Every beat, every lyric, every dance move told a story; and the story was of the joy and gratitude of Jesus' victory over death. The message wasn't meant specifically for Easter, because for them, **everyday is Easter!** Everyday they wake up ready to praise God, in thanks for the gift of life in Jesus!

And I mean, they wake up earrrrrrrly to offer praise to Jesus. It had to have been 5:30 in the morning when I heard first the drums and the shakers, then the singing and clapping. And then it came – the trumpet! Well, not exactly a

trumpet, but a plastic horn that stood in for a trumpet ... it reminded me of the sound of the ram's horn of Judaism, the shofar.

Phil is going to play a clip from the celebration. You'll hear the drums, you'll see the dancers, you'll see the students and a glimpse of the campus – and you'll hear the horn. You'll hear the horn and then my commentary about how the music woke me up and as they came closer to our sleeping quarters: when the horn blew, I thought a truck was bearing down on us!! But the exuberance and joy are all very present. Let's [watch](#).

Trust me, the dancers did a lot more than bounce in a line, but it's all about the joy; it's all about the joy of the resurrection. No matter what life throws at them, gratitude for God's abiding love is at the driving core of their lives. I think we have a lot to learn from that community.

The Stated Clerk of our presbytery, Judy Mitchell, has as her email signature line:

Every day - Christmas Day. Every day - Good Friday. Every day - Easter Sunday.

Every day.

That choir reminded me of that quote - to wake up each morning with an understanding that while there is suffering in our own lives, and all around the world, God's promise of redemption is born anew every day - and that there are inconceivable miracles of new life that can break in at any moment.

And it all started early in the morning when all was quiet – then God did something that no one expected, and made a lot of noise. And now it is time for

each one of us to pick up our own trumpets and let the world know that, to quote that great hymn found at the conclusion of Romans 8,

we are more than conquerors (over what life has to throw at us) because of God who has loved us. 38 For ... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

And that, my friends, is worth tooting your horn about!

Thanks be to God.

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen, indeed!

Amen!