

## Fallor Ergo Sum

### Luke 24:1-35

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The 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. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But 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.

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished

from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Kim Stafford teaches creative writing at Lewis and Clark College right here in Portland. One night he was teaching a graduate workshop on writing, and it really wasn’t going well. The class was stumbling. He wasn’t quite sure what to do with them. Then, during the break, one of the students came up to him with a thought.

“I have an idea, but it’s kind of strange,” he said. “What if we tried writing resumes of failure?”

Stafford blinked, staring at the young man as if he had sprouted a second head. “Whuh?”

“A resume of failure. See, I’ve been filling out all of these applications and creating draft after draft of my resume. And this resume- it’s so filled with every great thing I’ve ever done, every fantastic, noteworthy moment- but behind every one of these great moments is a string of mistakes and wrong turns. And frankly, these are a lot more interesting sometimes. I don’t know, I think there might be something to write about there.”

Immediately understanding and seeing the potential in this, Stafford agreed. And the class spent the rest of the night working on what they called their resumes of failure. What they did is they took every bright moment in their lives, every accomplishment worthy enough to list on their resumes- and then they dug a little more deeply. They looked a little more closely, a

little more honestly at those moments asking themselves what they gave up, or what they let go, or what didn't go so well in order to make those resume bullet points shine so brightly.

More than anyone Stafford himself enthusiastically embraced this practice. He wrote up his own resume of failure offering it to the world a couple of weeks ago on OPB's Think Out Loud. Some of the examples are small. He writes about his Ph.D for instance. Now achieving his doctorate is an extraordinary accomplishment. But, he said, the cost was completely squandering his 20's. He refers to himself as a wanderer, a poet, and lost romantic, and yet now he realizes he spent what might have been the freest days of his life studying literary criticism, Latin, and writing a 300 page thesis his advisor referred to as the most turgid, boring prose in history. And friends when a very tweedy academic tells you your prose is boring...that's not a good sign.

Some of his examples were a little more significant- some were as big as life and death. In 2003 he published a book: Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer's Craft. That same year his brother, his only sibling, took his own life. "Eloquent listening?" he writes. "Even as I preached the gospel of eloquent listening to my students I did not hear my own brother crying out to me."

Every success, Stafford says, is married, braided to a corresponding failure, often hidden. For every one thing we get right, we make dozens of mistakes along the way. And if we only lift up and pay attention to what's best and brightest- we will never fully see and understand our lives as God would have us.

This is more true of Easter than any other holiday. Easter is the great feast of the Christian year. While it's true that today Christmas is probably more popular, historically Easter has always been considered the most significant. And why not? It's such an incredible time of light and joy- Easter is life in the face of death. Easter is God's best even in the midst of our worst.

But I've noticed we kind of overdo it a little bit in the church. We pull out all the stops and create such a show of it, a spectacle almost in some churches. And I wonder if we don't do this as a way of making up for what's actually happening in the story- which isn't very bright and showy at all. I mean when we actually read it, the Easter story isn't an easy story, it's certainly not a simple story of triumph and success. In fact its more full of failure than it is of glory. It's a story about people making a LOT of mistakes before they get anything right.



Take Luke's version this morning. It starts out in confusion and grief. Jesus has been taken from his family of disciples in the cruelest way imaginable. And in the blackness before dawn, long before the sun is up, the women, unable to sleep, make their lonely way to his tomb. When they arrive they see a sickening sight- the rock, the huge rock sealing the tomb has been dislodged. Alarmed, they enter. When their eyes adjust to the light they can't find Jesus' body anywhere, and as they begin to panic they suddenly see two young men there who say: "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" They tell the women Jesus has been raised, and to run and tell the others.

And they do. They go and tell the men everything they've seen, but the response is withering. Our translation says the men considered what the women had to say an "idle tale". One theologian, Anna Carter Florence, teaches us this is about as weak a translation as you can get. The word Luke uses here is *leira*. And *leira* is not a nice word. *Leira* is not a word you would use in church. When Luke says the men consider the women's story to be *leira*, he's saying they thought it was nonsense, garbage, trash, bull, and worse. *Leira*, she writes, is "locker-room word, a wet towel whipping through a chorus of jeers."

Now the women weren't going to strangers here. They weren't out on street corners yelling at people and handing out tracts. They went to the people they knew the best- the ones who loved them the most. And THIS is how they're treated? The men mock this story of resurrection and dismiss the women in the most painful way, as if to say don't worry your pretty little heads about something you couldn't possibly understand. It's such a terrible moment. A broken moment. An utter failure of communication. But while this is the first failure in the story- it certainly isn't the last.

The next two failures involve the two disciples leaving Jerusalem on that Sunday afternoon. We only know one of their names, Cleopas. And the only other thing we know about them is that they're leaving town with their heads hanging down and their tails between their legs. They have, in spite of all Christ's teaching and preparation, they have failed to grasp what was happening. And they get an earful about this when the risen Christ shows up in their midst.

What have you been talking about? Jesus wants to know. And the two tell him the whole sad story. And Christ isn't very understanding. He isn't very pastoral. His words are

sharp. “How foolish you are. How slow to believe everything you’ve been taught.” They had studied for years, but when the test finally came- they failed. They got a big, fat ‘F’.

And there’s the third, and most tragic mistake. Not only were they awful to the women, not only did they fail to understand what Jesus had taught, but then, when he shows up again, when he’s right there in their faces- they fail to recognize him. It would take anywhere from two to three hours to walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus- and in all that time, as he basically offers a remedial theology course for them, but they don’t even realize who it is they’re walking with. It isn’t until the breaking of the bread and he leaves them that it suddenly dawns on them who it was.

And to me, this is just a heartbreaking failure. To be missing someone so much, and then, when you do get a few more minutes with them, to miss that? Dah. It’s so painful.



So, the Easter story, when we really read it- it’s just not the kind of Easter story anyone in the church today would write. There’s no giant bunny hopping around. No laughing children looking for eggs. None of the ladies are wearing beautiful hats. There aren’t any brunches going on. And there’s no big worship service with music and art and everybody pulling out the stops. No, the actual story seems more about the disciples getting it wrong over and over again than it is about anyone being right.



Now, while this may seem like a bad thing, an embarrassment maybe we shouldn't talk about on such a nice occasion, I actually think this is where the good news is. I do. I actually think the good news is that Easter helps us learn how to be wrong.



Now, everyone knows that in general we aren't perfect- this is no big deal. Every single one of us here this morning would agree that we all makes mistakes. Right? But being wrong in particular- well that's another story. We don't mind other people being wrong, but there's not a single one of us who likes to be in that position.

Personally? I will fight over the stupidest things. If someone challenges me on something I feel really confident about, like just yesterday morning Melis and I got into it at the breakfast table over the size of wolverines. She said they were bigger- I said they were smaller. Now neither one of us has seen or will probably ever see a wolverine. I mean really, people. Over the smallest things we will get our backs up and defend ourselves using a liberal mix of Google and huffiness to show our interlocutors how foolish they were to question us. And, like the 1 time in 38 that I'm actually right- well it's sweet.

We laugh, but most of us are like this- especially when it comes to someone questioning you about small details. And there's a reason for this. See, when we were very young children we learned an incredibly unhelpful lesson very, very well. We learned that bright, intelligent, good kids studied hard and came up with the right answers in class and on tests. But lazy kids, bad kids, stupid kids- well, they didn't work hard, or they weren't that smart- and they, well they didn't get the right answers. They got the wrong answers.

And we learned this terrible, untruth- we learned that being a good person means being right. And if we get the answers wrong... well it means there's something wrong with us.

And so you and I do our very best NEVER to be wrong. We create what writer Kathryn Schulz calls a "bubble of rightness." This bubble of rightness we live in makes us all pretty much feel the way we see the world is the right way to see it. And these bubbles of rightness cause us terrible problems.

These bubbles cause us to make mistakes. Just this week a doctor from Lake Oswego did surgery on a young boy from Vancouver, Washington with a lazy eye. When the child woke up the first thing he and his parents were wondering was why did he have bandages on both eyes? Well, because the surgeon operated on the wrong eye first- and when the team realized what she was doing, they had to stop and then change sides and work on the eye that really was the problem. And how his vision may have been damaged in both eyes.

When a similar error occurred to a surgeon at Harvard's teaching hospital a few years ago, the hospital administrator released a statement saying: "For whatever reason, the doctor simply felt he was operating on the correct side." It's likely that both of these doctors trusted in this feeling of rightness, this bubble of rightness- and they made a tragic error because of it.

So, this bubble of rightness we have causes us practical problems. Worse, it also causes us relational problems, too. See, when you and I are walking around believing we're right all the time, we run into a huge challenge: we encounter other people who feel equally right about the way they see the world and sometimes they disagree with us. And you and I react the same way. First when we encounter someone who disagrees with us we just think they're ignorant. They

just don't have all the fact. But, if we lay it out for them and explain it to them- well, then they'll see the light and get on board. But then, what if that doesn't work? What if we explain everything, but they still don't see our point? Ah- no problem. Then we decide this person isn't ignorant; no, they're an idiot. No, it's true. Sometimes you can explain everything to someone. You can make every argument and speak slowly and use small words. But they STILL will not understand and see the world in the correct way. And when that happens, well then you must be dealing with someone whose just a few clowns short of a circus. But then, what if you know that's not true, what if you know this person really isn't an idiot? Well, when we've ruled everything else out- then we begin to see them as an enemy, a threat. And it begins to be hard to even see them as a full human being when that happens- much less someone who bears the image of God.



This inability to be wrong- this bubble of rightness, this is a catastrophic problem for us. And the reason Easter is such good news is that Easter pops this bubble. The story itself pops this bubble. Because it is such an absurd story, a story that makes no sense to our minds- if we listen to it at all it causes us to step out of our sense of rightness and wonder if maybe there's something else going on.

Everyone of us here knows that when someone dies- that's it. It's over. When someone dies they're dead. That's what dead means. They are NOT coming back. But at Easter. Well. Jesus dies. But instead of staying that way, something else happens instead.

And if we listen to this story at all- it causes us to scratch our heads and wonder. This is why those disciples were struggling so much in the story- Easter was helping them learn something very, very hard. It was helping them learn how to step outside their bubbles of rightness and to be wrong. And it was hard. Those women come in and tell them something that doesn't make sense- and at first they're nasty. They stay in their little bubbles. But. Luke says Peter does get up a little bit later. And he goes down to that tomb. You know, just to see. That Easter Peter was learning how to be wrong in the best way- he was learning how to step outside his bubble of rightness long enough to say, "You know, maybe I am wrong. Maybe there's something else going on here."

And Cleopas and his friend. It's the same way. Jesus is dead. They're running away. And then they meet that strange man on the road. And he bursts their bubbles of rightness open again and again. But each of them, when he's going to leave them- instead of saying good riddance because we don't like hanging around people who make us feel wrong, they say, "No, stay with us. Keep talking." Each of them was learning how to be wrong- how to step outside their own perspective and say maybe something else is going on here.

This is what Easter is about. It's being confronted with a story that really doesn't make any sense to anyone, and learning how to step outside our bubbles of rightness just long enough to give it a chance. And we desperately need to learn how to do this.

Because maybe you grew up thinking you were going to finish school, get the job of your dreams, and work for that company for a long, long time- but then, something else happened instead.

Or maybe you thought you would marry your high school sweetheart, and settle down, and buy a house, and grow old together- but then, something else happened instead.

Maybe you thought you might have children one day, a little boy or a little girl who you would love, and they would grow up and have friends, and play sports, and go to college, and have kids of their own some day- but then something else happened instead.

About a thousand years before Descartes wrote Cogito Ergo Sum: I think therefore I am, Augustine wrote something very similar, but marvelously different. He wrote: Fallor Ergo Sum: I make mistakes therefore I am. Being wrong, making mistakes- this isn't something to be embarrassed of, something to hide. It's who we are. It's how we learn.

This Easter, may we have ears to hear the whole story- both the triumph of Christ's resurrection and the gaffs the disciples make. And may all of us in the days ahead be able to step outside our fearful need to be right and learn how to say, "Hey, maybe there's more going on than I thought. Maybe, I'm wrong. **Amen.**