

SERMON

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There's this moment in the movie, *The Lion King*, when Simba has to decide what he's going to do next. He's grown up in exile, hiding from what had happened when his Uncle Scar killed his father, the king. He's grown up blaming himself for that death (because Scar planted that seed). And it's not until Rafiki shows him the way, taking him to a pool of water, that Simba realizes his true purpose.

If it has been a little while since you've seen this movie, I hope you're keeping up...I don't have time to tell you the whole thing. And if you've never seen it, well that means you have homework for after Easter dinner later today. You can stream it on Disney+. If you're still a DVD user, I have a copy you can borrow.

Anyway, when Simba looks in the water, he sees a reflection of himself that transforms into a reflection of his father, Mufasa. And then Mufasa shows up in a dazzling night sky, rolling in on the clouds to tell Simba he has forgotten. "You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me."

I wish I could do a good James Earl Jones impression, but you'll just have to imagine his deep, powerful voice echoing across the heavens to this scared, grown, but still young, cub. "You are more than what you have become...Remember who you are...Remember..." He fades back into the night echoing that word to his surviving son. "Remember." And Simba does. He remembers he is Mufasa's boy and goes back and wins the day for his family and friends.

Great movie – one of my all-time favorites.

And today we need the reminder to remember who we are.

Today, of all days, we gather in this place to remember. Today, in the midst of whatever is happening outside these walls, we make the journey to the tomb once again to remember what God promises. The journey might be full of anticipatory joy, or like the women who make that journey on the first Easter, it might be filled with grief and trepidation.

"Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them" went to the cold, dark place where Jesus had been entombed just two sunsets ago. They had taken the Sabbath day to rest as was expected and they go as soon as they can – in the pre-dawn glow of the first day of the week – to anoint the body that should be lying there – lifeless, as cold as the rock in which it had been laid.

They weren't terribly worried when they found the stone moved. But they were perplexed when they ducked into the opening and there was no body. Jesus wasn't there.

They went from being perplexed to terrified when otherworldly messengers in dazzling white showed up. They were not prepared for this at all, and they hid their faces on the ground out of fear.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? ... Remember..." Remember what he told you. They came to that lifeless place out of devotion. They came to the tomb – to the place of the dead – because he was **their** beloved dead. But all that Jesus had told them had been forgotten with the arrest and crucifixion they had witnessed. All the teaching they had been given and miracles they had seen had fallen away in their grief and fear.

These dazzling messengers showed up and reminded them of what Jesus himself had said. He told them this would happen. He told them that the cross did not lead to the death they expected, but to a new and expansive life in Christ. They weren't supposed to be here in this place of death looking for the living. They were supposed to be **living** the promises that God has made in Jesus, the Christ. They were supposed to remember the truth that Jesus has brought into the world. They were supposed to believe what he had said and share that news with the world.

So, they do. They run back to the rest of Jesus' followers and share the amazing news that the tomb is empty and what Jesus **said** would happen **has** happened. They share the news that there is still life in the world.

And like the lion pride that rises up with Simba against Scar and the hyenas, the disciples join the journey back from death to life...oh, wait, no. That's not right.

The disciples, the always foolish and forgetful disciples, don't. believe. Them. They hear the most amazing news in the history of creation, and they think it's an "idle tale." Worthless words, humbug, meaningless, whatever colorful descriptions you'd like to imagine here – and some I'm not going to say out loud.

The disciples **refuse** to remember. The disciples want to stay in a place of death. It's easier for them to dismiss the tale of these women than it is to trust what might come next if the tale is true. It's easier for them to live in the dead place that grief has brought them to than to remember what life could be.

And maybe it's easier for us to live with the unbelieving disciples than it is to risk what it might mean to bring life back into this world. I get it. I look at what is happening around us where it feels like death and hate are winning, and it can be so hard to rise up and speak words of life and love. It's hard to **remember the promise** when all we see is the death. But we have the story of these women to hold onto. We have the example they set in the face of death and grief and fear.

Right in the middle of that darkness. Right when we feel nothing but death, that's where the stone rolls away and the journey back to life begins. We have this expansive life that God brings to the world simply because God **is** life. God doesn't **dwell** in the darkness of the tomb and in the places of death. God goes into those places to pull us out and bring us into places of life.

The women remembered and told their story even in the face of disbelief. The women remembered and proclaimed the truth of resurrection even when they had not yet seen the risen Christ. The women moved from death to life at the first opportunity because they remembered the promise of God and decided to live that out instead of believing in the lies of this world.

What does it take for us to remember what Jesus has said and done to shift us from death to life? What does it take to get us out of the tomb and back to the places of the living where Jesus told us he would be?

Simba went back to the pride lands and restored his community to life. I know it's just a Disney-created story about anthropomorphized lions, but there is also truth there. When we remember the promise of life that comes in the places of death that we experience, then we can see the expansive life that comes from God, through the resurrected Christ, in the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit. Remember who and whose you are. Always. Amen.