

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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April 20, 2025

On a recent family trip, I visited a swamp with my partner and my cousin. At this sanctuary, we got a booklet about all the different types of plants and animals that we might see. After flipping through it, I really wanted to see the grey polypody fern. So, we set out on the 2.5-mile boardwalk *above* the swamp (thank God) and went to find alligators, turtles, air plants, and the grey polypody. About a half mile in I asked if anyone had seen the grey polypody. Now, I'm fairly certain neither one of them cared as much about finding this fern as they cared about an Instagram worthy photo. Yet, after I asked the question, my cousin, said, "oh there's one." I looked at it, looked at the drawing in our booklet, and said, "yeah, I don't think that's it. It looks too big." So, I looked down at the ground. Looked at the picture in the booklet. Looked at the ground again. At which point, my partner, who I think was getting frustrated that I was slowing down his "fitness walk" said, "Do you remember what you read in the booklet? Didn't it say it grows on tree trunks and tree limbs?"

So, I looked up from the ground, and sure enough, he was right – but we won't tell him that. I began looking at the trunks and branches of the tree and to my surprise, the fern was all around us. It was on this branch, and that stump, and that fallen tree. These little ferns had been around us this whole time.

In today's gospel, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women were perplexed at the empty tomb as it was not what they expected. Let's not forget that these women had been with Jesus in Galilee, they traveled with him to Jerusalem, and they witnessed his gruesome and shameful execution – a scene that was all too familiar in the Roman empire. It's not that they happened to be around when Jesus was killed, but they were followers of Jesus.

In fact, the Bible tells us that Joanna and Mary Magdalene not only traveled with Jesus throughout his ministry, but that they financially supported Jesus's ministry. These women knew Jesus well, they knew his teachings, and they likely heard Jesus say that he would be crucified and would rise again. Yet, it wasn't until the men in dazzling clothes (I like to think that they were a couple of fabulous gays), told them to remember what Jesus said that it finally clicked. They finally understood what Jesus meant, and they went and told the disciples. These women (not the men) were the first apostles who went to share the good news. But, as is typical in Luke's gospel, the disciples are much slower to understand. Except for Peter, who got up and ran to the tomb to see for himself.

You see, it was their remembering that the empty tomb made sense. It was in remembering that they were transformed. It was in remembering that the resurrection became real. And that's the thing about Easter, about the resurrection, and about our God—remembering is central. And here's where things get really interesting. We often think that the opposite of “remember” is “to forget.” Yet, linguistically-speaking, the root of remember is the same as dismember. This common root means “limb” or “member of the body.” In

essence, remember and dismember are built off the same concept. To remember means bringing the parts of something (like a story or a person) back together in your mind. While dismember is to take the limbs apart or break up the body (either literally or metaphorically). To re-member or remember is bringing things together, while dismembering is taking it apart or breaking it up.

And, it's easy for the world to pull apart our bodies, minds, and souls. Our confidence is pulled apart as the world tries to convince us that money, power, and privilege are our defining characteristics. The world tries to re-write history and gaslight our experiences to break apart commonality and understanding. So, when institutions that serve the poor and the marginalized are broken apart under the guise of efficiency, we are dismembered. When we are told that we are not pretty enough, skinny enough, straight enough, masculine enough, white enough, or rich enough, we are dismembered. When we're tricked into believing that our actions don't impact the environment and our local community because we are all independent, we are dismembered. You see, Jesus was nailed to a cross, speared in the side, and shamed by the religious leaders and humiliated by the political empire so that no one would ever want to recall, claim, or be associated with him. They wanted him to be completely dismembered.

But, that's the thing about Easter. Today, we heard the story of those women at the tomb who remembered Jesus. They had come to cover the stench of his rotting flesh in the darkest of places, but instead they found resurrection. They were the first to understand that when the world tries to dismember us, we re-member. When the powers that be try to shame us into never telling

the true story, we go and tell. When the world says look over here at the latest headline, at that funny video, or your chance to be famous, God says, “remember.” Remember how back in Genesis, God remembered Noah and the animals, God remembered Abraham and Lot, God remembered the Israelites, and God remembered Hannah. Then, God got into the business of being a holy reminder-er. So, God reminded the Israelites of whose they are over and over and over again. And if that all still wasn’t enough, then we are invited to remember Jesus. Remember how Jesus ate with the poor, the outcast, and the prostitutes; remember how he had a meal with those who had sold out to the Roman empire, remember how he shared a meal with the one who betrayed him, and remember how we are all invited to share in the breaking of the bread. And, each time we gather here we remember that Jesus said, “do this in remembrance of me.”

You see, that is a central mystery of our faith together. Namely, that in breaking apart the bread that we are actually re-membering. In tearing apart a common loaf, we are unified. For, resurrection is about remembering, and the story is only crucified and forgotten if we dismember it and leave it to be. That’s because remembering is an act of resistance – we resist hate when we tell the story of love; we resist division when we tell the story of unity, and we resist retribution when we tell the story of grace. And, that is the story that we all need to hear.

So, each time that we speak the story of love, that we share the story of love, that we live the story of love, we are participating in the remembering, and we become part of the resurrection. For the resurrection was not just a

single incident over two-thousand years ago; rather, resurrection is among us in little ways of love in unexpected places.

And that was the thing about that grey polypod. Even though I had read that this odd little fern would be on a trunk or a branch. I didn't get it. It wasn't until I remembered what I was told that I saw the fern I was seeking. And the real interesting thing about this little fern is that it has incredible persistence. In the deepest of droughts, it literally curls up and flips its leaves over to further preserve itself from drying out. But when the rains fall again, it brings water into its leaves and unfurls to look lush and vibrant again, which is why you may know this little grey polypod as the resurrection fern.

Friends, there's much to be learned from God's gift of creation and from God's gift of love. May we, on this Easter Sunday, recall the ways that God has always remembered us from the very beginning. And, may we be about God's holy remembering as we embody the resurrection. For, in our remembering: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed – Alleluia!