

**Trinity Church in the City of Boston**

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*Resurrection, Luke 24:1-12*

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Mary Magdalene; Joanna; Mary, the mother of James; and the other women who had come with Jesus from Galilee, all leave their homes before dawn and begin a somber procession. Arriving at the tomb, they find the stone rolled away from the cave's entrance and Jesus' body missing. Freaking out (or in the Gospel's politesse, "while they were perplexed about this"), two men in "dazzling" clothes suddenly appear beside them.<sup>i</sup> In the Greek, the men gleam "like *lightning*," the image Luke uses in Chapter 17 when Jesus prophesies the flashing storm of God's coming reign – an immediate signal of this encounter's consequence.<sup>ii</sup>

These glimmering figures then ask: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"<sup>iii</sup>

The angels' words strike before they reassure: the women have brought spices to anoint a man they are sure is dead – they witnessed his final breath on the cross, they went with Joseph of Arimathea to claim his body, they helped lay him in the tomb – and now the strangers' rhetorical question seems to condemn cruelly their faithful devotion. Further, the women have dared not imperil their broken hearts further by indulging that fever dream of the grieving, the sleepy prayer that their loss will prove only a nightmare, that they will awake from their aching to find their loved one alive.

Yet, the angels continue: "[Jesus] 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."<sup>iv</sup> These heralds aim their call as an *instruction*, and not as a question: *Remember*, they tell the women: and, no matter what trouble comes, no matter what pain you suffer, no matter what fate you fear – *Remember*, they speak to us, as well.

On November 15, 2016, Timothy Snyder, a Holocaust scholar and history professor at Yale, posted to Facebook his own call to *Remember*, writing: "Americans are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience. Now is a good time to do so. Here are twenty lessons from the twentieth century, adapted to the circumstances of today."<sup>v</sup> Only months later, he adapted, expanded, and published his social-media treatise in a slight volume.

In his prologue, Snyder explains, "the [United States' Founders] sought to avoid the evil that they, like the ancient philosophers, called *tyranny*. [By 'tyranny,' t]hey had in mind the usurpation of power by a single individual or group, or the circumvention of law by rulers for their own benefit [rather than the common good]."<sup>vi</sup> He continues, "The European history of the twentieth century shows us that societies *can* break, democracies *can* fall, ethics can collapse,

and ordinary [neighbors] can find themselves standing over death pits with guns in their hands. It would serve us well today to [*Remember*, and to seek an understanding] why.”<sup>vii</sup>

Of the twenty lessons Snyder offers, several call for simple, constructive practices: “Make eye contact” and “[Engage in] small talk.” Others reverberate with unsettling alarm: “Be wary of paramilitaries” and “Be calm when the unthinkable arrives.” Among the mix, I especially take heart in two of his commissions heralding us this Easter Day: “Contribute to good causes” and “Defend institutions.”

Snyder explains, “[Institutions] help us to preserve decency. [And, in turn, those institutions] need our help as well.”<sup>viii</sup> See, as organizations larger than the will of any member and greater than the urgency of any moment, institutions have a strength and consequence far exceeding the sums of their constituents. Snyder continues:

“When Americans think of freedom, [we] tend to conclude that the individual should be empowered and the government kept at bay. This is all well and good. But one element of freedom is the choice of associates, and one defense of freedom is the activity of groups to sustain their members. These [groups] need not be expressly political: Václav Havel, the Czech dissident thinker, gave the example of brewing good beer” as a cause around which a consequential community can be created, and even that (pleasurably buzzed) cohort can join the bulwark against tyranny.<sup>ix</sup>

Luke’s Gospel understands these ideas implicitly, both from the shadow of the political institutions Jesus opposes, and in the light of the institution he inaugurates. The community that authored Luke also authored the Acts of the Apostles – indeed, the first chapter of Acts includes Luke’s final resurrection account and the story of Jesus’ ascension<sup>x</sup> – and that first generation of the faithful understood the ministry of Jesus as inextricably bound to the ministry of the Church. More than a short-lived movement, they understood Jesus’ resurrection to establish a hardy *institution*, one commissioned to build Beloved Community within itself and for the sake of the whole creation ... one whose telos directed them to the reign of Christ ... one intended to endure until God’s Kingdom arrived.

According to the second chapter of Acts, members of this nascent institution practiced love of one another as Jesus had loved them; they spent time together in worship, they ate with glad and generous hearts, and they praised God.”<sup>xi</sup> Moreover, “having the goodwill of the people,” this new collaborative sought to *grow*, and “day by day” the Lord added members to their number. See, recognizing the might and muscle of the corrupt, tyrannical authorities, Jesus convened a *counter*-community and entrusted to it – to us! – the Good News.

Thanks be to God, this love-nurturing, peace-sowing, meaning-making institution has endured, and we who gather today inherit its blessings. Even so, recognizing tyranny’s creep even into this glad morning, Snyder warns us against complacency: “Do not speak of ‘*our* institutions’” he writes, “unless you [are *making* them yours] by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves.”<sup>xii</sup> That is, along with the *privilege* of our inheritances in faith, so, too, we receive *responsibility* to assure the Church’s vitality within and beyond our lifetimes.

For us who have received the gifts of the Church, so, too, do we inherit its imperfections, and the Church's history in harm – by cause and complicity – commands our attention, our acknowledgement, and our faithful labor for repair. Yet for us who follow the Resurrected Jesus – for us who *Remember* – we undertake that reparation in Love. In the same spirit of generosity upon which Christ founded the Church ... in the same hopeful spirit with which our first forebearers gathered as the Church ... by this Easter Day we know that not even death can condemn God's dream for this institution and for the whole world! Therefore, **we endeavor reparations with Love that builds up the Church, rather than tears it down.**

Yet, some will believe this an idle tale.<sup>xiii</sup>

Pressured by the “politics of emergency,” the wounded, fearful, and self-righteous too often take their frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments and train them on the Church. Though these deconstructionists claim to oppose the racist, bigoted, misogynistic, willfully ignorant, fundamentalist Christians who have coddled partisan politicians to secure secular power, they nonetheless borrow on that opposition's tyrannical tactics to secure their own status. And the Church – with our desire to hear and honor the hurts and hopes of all – has proven especially vulnerable to their caustic shouts; meeting dread with dread and hurt with hurt, the Church has cowered to these bullies for fear of embarrassment, for fear of being associated with the wrong crowd, with the wrong words, with the wrong ideas. And instead of the Lord adding to our number day-by-day according to our goodwill for all people and that all people would have for us, the mainline Protestant Church in the United States has instead, decade-by-decade, suffered a well-earned decline.

Trinitarians, *Remember*: Jesus has risen! And things which were cast down are being raised up ... and things which had grown old are being made new ... and all things are being brought to their perfection by the one through whom all things were made, even Christ our Lord!

Snyder continues:

“Insofar as we take pride in [the] activities [we undertake within an institution,] and come to know others who do so as well, we are creating [a more] civil society. [Shared undertakings] teach us that we can trust people beyond a narrow circle of friends and families, and[, *together*, we can] recognize [credible, dependable] authorities from whom we can learn. [Enriching this] capacity for trust and learning can make life seem less chaotic and mysterious, and democratic politics more plausible and attractive. [So choose an institution you care about ... and take its side.]”<sup>xiv</sup>

Oh, friends, hear it now and trust its truth: on this Easter Sunday, let it be known that we at Trinity Church in the City of Boston take the side of that institution the resurrected Jesus commissioned with the Holy Spirit,<sup>xv</sup> that wonderful and sacred mystery that relieves the poor, consoles the mourning, and speaks truth to power.

On this Easter Sunday, let it be known that we at Trinity Church will follow the readiness of the loving, the capacity of the generous, and the aspiration of the hopeful, rather than bowing to the redress of the complaining and the conniving, the spiteful and the selfish.

On this Easter Sunday, let it be known that we at Trinity Church will hope what God hopes and dream what God dreams, that we will endeavor vibrant, life-affirming, joy-inspiring Beloved Community, where we will love one another as God has loved us, setting the needs of others before our own over and over and over again, without mistrust or any heed of merit.

On this Easter Sunday, let it be known that we at Trinity Church will turn our disappointments and our worries about the condition of the cosmos into *Love* for the Church ... *Love* for this congregation ... *Love* for the Body of Christ throughout the world ... *Love* that will not falter before the tyranny of any moment's insurgency.

And if you want to change the world for this Good and for the Good News ... if you want to join in this movement of ultimate concern ... then come back ... *come back!* Because we need you, God needs you, the cause of mercy and justice needs you to come back and to join us – one by one, pew by pew, choosing to believe that the only force powerful enough to turn resentment into generosity, to undue systemic unfairness, and to turn artillery into bread is *Love* – the Love we strive to practice, share, and experience as part of this parish family.

For the life of the world to come,  
*Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Luke 24:4.

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 17:24.

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 24:5.

<sup>iv</sup> Luke 24:5-7.

<sup>v</sup> Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From The Twentieth Century*. Tim Duggan Books, New York, 2017, p. 13.

<sup>vi</sup> Snyder, p. 10.

<sup>vii</sup> Snyder, pp. 11-12.

<sup>viii</sup> Snyder, p. 22.

<sup>ix</sup> Snyder, 93.

<sup>x</sup> Acts 1:1-5, 9. “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instruction through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God ... as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

<sup>xi</sup> Acts 2:46-47.

<sup>xii</sup> Snyder, p. 22.

<sup>xiii</sup> Luke 24:11.

<sup>xiv</sup> Snyder, pp. 93-94, 22.

<sup>xv</sup> Acts 1:8.