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## *Slow of Heart to Believe*

**A sermon by Canon Cathy Zappa**  
**Easter 3 – Year A**

As we continue celebrating Christ's resurrection on this third Sunday of Easter, I have a question for you: Do you believe in the resurrection? What does that even mean, to believe in the resurrection?

If you aren't sure how to answer, take heart. You're not alone. In fact, as our Easter Gospels make clear, again and again, even the first eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection had trouble believing what they were seeing!

This week, we hear from Luke about two of them, Cleopas and perhaps his wife, on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, three days after Jesus' death. They're talking about all that's happened in the last few days: Jesus was betrayed, condemned, crucified. He died and was buried.

But then suddenly, the risen Lord himself appears and falls into step with them! But they don't recognize him.

He talks to them—asks what they're discussing; and they tell him all about these events and their dashed hopes for Jesus of Nazareth. But they don't recognize him.

What's more, they add with dismay, some women found his tomb empty this morning, and others saw it too. But they don't know what this means—though, mind you, Jesus had told them that he would die and be resurrected *on the third day*.

Jesus grows impatient with their reluctance to see and believe, and tries to help them by interpreting all the Scriptures say about himself. But they still don't understand, and they still don't recognize him.

Evening falls, and they invite this supposed stranger to stay with them. But—that's right—they still don't recognize him. That is, until he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them. And suddenly, they see. And they look back and recognize all the clues that they'd missed earlier in the day, and in scripture, and in their years with Jesus.

Once they see, everything changes: they literally change course, turning around and racing back to Jerusalem to spread the good news.

It's a curious story, isn't it? Why on earth don't they recognize him sooner? Why are they so slow of heart to believe the good news that they've been promised—that's been foretold, in Scripture, and by Christ himself?

Maybe because it doesn't make sense, based on what they know and have seen. Maybe because their sorrow and disappointment are so raw. Maybe because they sense the radical reorientation this would require of them.

I don't know, but I do understand. I would've been slow to believe, too, I think. I still am sometimes. Indeed, the resurrection is quite a stumbling block—perhaps more of a stumbling block than the crucifixion itself, then, and now.

After all, the resurrection completely defies what we know of the laws of nature. We have no frame of reference for it, outside of the *Walking Dead* or *Vampire Diaries*.

And because we have no frame of reference for it, because it can't be historically or scientifically verified, we may dismiss it as fantasy, myth, allegory, or symbol—anything but the truth, which we modern folk tend to define so narrowly and unimaginatively.

Plus, there's still pain, and death, and sorrow, and all kinds of things that we might've hoped the resurrection would take away. My child still gets hurt; I still have friends languishing in prison, or being attacked by cancer; my grandparents are still gone. How can the resurrection be true, if all of this is true, too?

This last week, I saw a movie called *Collateral Beauty*, which has been on my mind this week. It's about a successful marketer named Howard, whose 6-year-old daughter dies from a rare form of cancer. In grief, he chooses a kind of living death that costs him his marriage and his job. Two years later, still numb to life, he gets scared that he's losing his mind. So he finally steps into a grief group, where he meets a woman who tells him about a strange encounter she had, when her daughter was dying.

She was sitting outside of the hospital room, and an old woman sat next to her, asked her who she was losing, and said: "Be sure to pay attention to the collateral beauty." She had no idea what the woman meant, she explains to Howard, until she saw it for herself, collateral beauty: a sensitivity, a sense of connection, an aliveness to both pain and beauty. It didn't undo what had been done, she said, or make it ok. But it was there, *also*.

Now, this being Hollywood, you expect our hero to grab hold of this glimmer of hope and pull himself out of the death he's chosen; you expect this to be the beginning of the happily ever after. But it's not. Because he dismisses it as sentimental fancy—a nice but meaningless platitude. He's so afraid to hope again. He's so afraid that to live again would be to betray the memory of his daughter. He thinks that it's an either/or.

But then one day, he experiences it, too: he becomes aware of all these things happening at once—pain, beauty, loss, love. Death. Life. Time. Eternity. And he realizes that this is the collateral beauty. It doesn't erase or diminish all that has been. It's just there, *also*.

Sadness, disappointment, the memory of death linger long after Christ is risen, too. These things are still real. They've not been undone or erased by the resurrection. But they have been changed.

Life and beauty are entangled with death; hope is woven into disappointment. Time and eternity, joy and sorrow, belief and unbelief exist side by side. It's not an either/or. It's a new reality that encompasses all of this and that promises that God is with us in all of it, then, and now, and forever. The *same* Christ who became human, and loved his own to the end, to the cross—that same Christ is with us still—encountering us, calling us, transforming us, redeeming us.

That's the truth of the resurrection, I believe, at least as I see it today: that Christ is with us, still. And though this may not be historically or scientifically verifiable, many of us know that it's true. We know it's true, because we, too, have glimpsed Christ moving among us, renewing us and our world; because we, too, have known the peace and power and new life that only come from Him; because we, too, have experienced him—in bread and wine, in Scripture, in prayer, in a stranger, in the resurrection of hope.

So do you believe in the resurrection? Do you believe—do you trust—that Christ lives today, and is being revealed to us still, and is giving us new life? Do you trust—*will* you trust—in the living God?