

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

C: The Resurrection of Our Lord / Easter Sunday
Luke 24:1-12, Acts 10:34-43, Isaiah 65:17-25

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“An Idle Tale”

*“While they were perplexed about the tomb being empty,
suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.
‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’ they asked.
‘Remember how he told you he must be crucified, and on the third day rise again?’
Then they did remember and ran to tell the rest of their company.
But to the apostles their words seemed an idle tale....”*

“Their words seemed an idle tale.”

But that should not have surprised the women.
Obviously they had thought Jesus’ own words –
his promise that he would be raised from death was an idle tale!

Even Jesus had wondered if God’s call to him –
the call to allow himself to be arrested & convicted & sentenced to death & actually die –
was an idle tale!

Surely he had heard God wrong! Surely there must be another way!

Surely God could figure out some other way so that this cup could pass from him,
so that he wouldn’t have to suffer and die.

Surely the words he had heard were not from God, but simply the idle tale of his own imagination!

Whether we are talking about those doubting disciples, or those forgetful females,
or even Jesus himself, that’s the nature of our human existence.

Caught between a material world of fact and a non-material world of faith,
between an outer physical world and an inner spiritual world,
between the things that we can prove, and the things we can’t,
those whispering words of “idle tale...idle tale...idle tale” form a recurring refrain.

From time immemorial this has been our lot.

The story of Adam & Eve makes it clear & no matter what the God of all power & love tells us,
there is a voice that whispers in our ear, “Was that really God’s voice you heard?”

“Are you sure that’s really what God said?”

“Are you sure that’s really what God meant?”

“It’s probably just the idle tale of someone else, or of your own imagination....”

Perhaps we have not yet had a personal encounter with the living God,
and so when others talk of their experiences we have no basis for understanding
and their words seem to us an idle tale.

Or perhaps we have had a personal encounter with the living God, but when we dare to share it,
people make it clear to us that our story is to them no more than an idle tale.

That can be frustrating and even painful but that’s not the worst of it –

because even when we do encounter the living God,
and even when the experience is so real that we dare to share,
those words of “idle tale” continue to taunt us
and make us doubt the presence and the promises of God.

God showed Abraham the stars in the sky and said, “I will give you this many descendants!”
And while Abraham never forgot that encounter entirely, that recurring refrain “idle tale”
came to him again and again over the 25 years between promise and fulfillment,
causing him to doubt and despair.

But in the end at the age of 90 Sarah gave birth for the first time!

In the end God’s promise to Abraham was fulfilled! It was NOT an idle tale!

Turn to someone and tell them: “It was NOT an idle tale!”

God showed the young boy Joseph in a dream
that his brothers and his father would one day bow down to him.

While Joseph never forgot that encounter entirely, that recurring refrain “idle tale”
came to him again and again over the 23 years between promise and fulfillment –
years filled with things that caused him to doubt and despair –
with things like being kidnapped & sold into slavery
and being falsely accused & thrown into prison.

But in the end, Joseph sits at Pharaoh’s right hand & his brothers & father do bow down to him!

In the end God’s promise to Joseph was fulfilled! It was NOT an idle tale!

Turn to someone and tell them: “It was NOT an idle tale!”

God appeared in a burning bush to the fugitive shepherd Moses and called him
to lead the entire Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt into freedom in a promised land.

While Moses never forgot that encounter entirely, that recurring refrain “idle tale”
came to him again and again over the 40 years between promise and fulfillment –
years filled with plagues, and with being caught between an army and a sea,
and with ungrateful people.

But in the end, he gets the people to the promised land!

In the end God’s promise to Moses was fulfilled! It was NOT an idle tale!

Turn to someone and tell them: “It was NOT an idle tale!”

God called Jesus at his baptism to make the God of power and love known to God’s children
and to teach them how to live in God’s kingdom
of truth & justice, and mercy & love, and peace & joy on earth.

While Jesus never forgot that encounter entirely, that recurring refrain “idle tale”
came to him again and again over the 3 years –
years filled with temptations, with accusations & betrayal & denial & abandonment,
and with suffering & pain & crucifixion & even death.

But in the end God does raise Jesus from the dead!

In the end God’s promise to Jesus was fulfilled! It was NOT an idle tale!

To many in our world this story is still nothing but an idle tale.

To many people we know the entirety of scripture is an idle tale.

To many of us here the stories others tell of their encounters with the living God
seem only an idle tale.

But I am here today to witness to what I KNOW:

- * That at the age of 3, God called me to be a pastor,
and even though everyone considered it an idle tale,
laughing at me because girls couldn't be,
God changed the rules in order to fulfill that promise;
- * That when during internship I believed everything in the Bible to be an idle tale,
the risen Christ appeared to me on an Easter Monday,
making it clear to me that this was no idle tale,
so that God could fulfill in a deeper way that original promise;
- * That when as a pastor I believed that stories of miraculous healings were likely idle tales,
God spoke to me through an Easter sermon and miraculously healed me from migraines,
making it clear to me that miraculous healings were no idle tale,
so that God could fulfill in a deeper way that original promise.

Those are just 3 of the times God has made it clear to me
that God's promises are NOT an idle tale.

In the past 3 years my life has been a continual story of God promising something,
me being initially amazed, and then hearing from without or within that recurring refrain:
“idle tale... idle tale... idle tale...”

And yet, over and against that recurring refrain,
comes the shouts of promise and fulfillment, of power and love, of triumph and victory.

It was NOT an idle tale!
God's promise to Jesus was fulfilled! God raised him from life to death!

It was NOT an idle tale!
Jesus' promise to his followers was fulfilled! He died but rose again!

It was NOT an idle tale!
The women knew it now!
The tomb was empty! They had seen men in dazzling clothes who told them Jesus was alive!

It was NOT an idle tale!
Peter knew it now!
The tomb was empty! The women had been telling the truth! Jesus was alive!

It was NOT an idle tale!
Jesus had called Peter – the one who so often said and did the exact wrong thing –
to carry his message to the world! And Peter did!

Turn to someone and tell them: “It was NOT an idle tale!”

Here's the thing:

no matter which character you are in this story,
no matter where you happen to be in terms of your relationship with God,
no matter if you have had a personal encounter with the living God or not,
no matter if you are currently believing God's promise
or believing that repeating refrain of idle tale, it doesn't matter.

Because God is here whether you know it or not,
and Christ is risen whether you believe it or not,
and the Spirit is working whether you sense it or not.

Maybe for you the Bible is an idle tale.

Maybe for you the story of Jesus being raised from the dead is an idle tale.

Maybe for you the promise that the Spirit can breathe new life
into individuals and congregations is an idle tale.

Maybe for you all my witnessing
to the signs & wonders & miracles of God's power & love & grace that I have experienced
is an idle tale.

But whether you or I are currently in a state of doubt or faith,
of hope or despair,
of seeing something as God's promise or as an idle tale,
the state of our minds and hearts and souls does not change the truth:

The witnesses of God's people are NOT an idle tale!

God's Word will not return to God empty!

God's promises will be fulfilled!

Even though that recurring refrain continues to cause us to depress us with doubt and despair,
we can stand against it by shouting back, "It is NOT an idle tale!"

So every time you hear the words, "idle tale", I ask you to shout back, "It is NOT an idle tale!"

God kept the promise to Abraham and Sarah! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

God kept the promise to Joseph! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

God kept the promise to Moses! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

God kept the promise to Jesus! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

God kept the promise to the women at the tomb! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

God kept the promise to Peter and the disciples! (idle tale?) **"It was NOT an idle tale!"**

Whatever God has promised you, **KNOW** that God will fulfill that promise.

No matter how long you have to wait between promise and fulfillment,
no matter how many times you hear someone else telling you that it's an idle tale,
no matter how many times you hear a voice inside your own head
saying that it's an idle tale,

KNOW that it is NOT an idle tale!

It is NOT an idle tale! For Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!