

You have just cleaned up a spill on the kitchen floor and suddenly you hear a crash in the next room, you lift your eyes heavenward and cry, “WHAT NEXT!?” Maybe after, “Who did it?” We have all had days like that. We long for some vision of what will happen next so we can be better prepared for it. There are days when we have had enough surprises!

Jesus has asked that we not worry about tomorrow or what is coming next. Yet that is what we often fear the most, the unknown of tomorrow—WHAT NEXT? If you have visited or lived in a New England coastal town or village you have seen houses with a strange room-like structure on the roof. It is glass and is not large enough for a bed or chair – it is traditionally known as the “widow’s walk.” Tradition says that it is here that the wives of sailors would look out, watching for a sign of a sailing ship returning home. Here prayers would be said for the safe return of the men who had been away from home, spending months or years at sea. Each day beyond the expected arrival date would add anxiety to the women – what might have happened. They longed for information on what news tomorrow might bring.

This is how I see John’s resurrection account—What next? The tomb is empty. As we compare John’s resurrection account with the other three we note that there is no mention of “fear” in John. John comes at the resurrection with a sense of the unknown. The key phrase for me is in verse 3, “*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him.*” There is no angelic presence in the first part of John’s recounting of the resurrection (see 20:11-12 for angelic presence). They simply do not know what has happened. Something has, but they are not sure what. Was the body stolen? Have they found another tomb for the body and moved it?

Peter and John leave the place where they are when they are told of the empty tomb and run to see if what the women have reported is true. John is in better condition, he wins. As he approaches the tomb, he stops and looks inside. There are the burial clothes folded, there is no body, indeed the tomb is empty. Then I imagine Peter running up and, not bothering to stop at the door, rushes in, and again the story of the women is confirmed. The grave clothes, burial cloth are there and the face cloth is folded away from the rest. Care was taken. John enters and joins him but they do not fully understand. They believe – but is it just that they believe the women’s story? John adds, “*They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.*” They go home. What next? Mary stays, her grief keeps her there.

Tomorrow—if we only knew, we could make better plans. I recall an interview with a man turning 100. His words were, “If I knew I was going to live this long I would have taken better care of myself.” We long for a crystal ball or some way to discern tomorrow. There is a growth in psychic counselors, palm readers, etc. We want to know tomorrow. We look for ways to discover what tomorrow might hold. We have a friend who spends some of his time visiting “psychic fairs” in Europe (yes, they have them and they are very popular with thousands in attendance). He takes a deck of Tarot cards with him and uses them to explain the Gospel message (some say this was the original intent of the cards). He says people are amazed when they hear the story of the Gospel told via the cards. We long for a glimpse of tomorrow. We want to know what is going to happen so we can be better prepared. He shares with the one who does know tomorrow.

Yet, we don't and cannot know for certain what tomorrow holds. We make plans and for the most part they come to pass. There may be a bump or two in the road but most of our plans come true. We occasionally have the "what if's" come to mind, but we do have some confidence in tomorrow mingled with some fear of what is next. This comes especially after something alters or changes our plans. A doctor's report, an accident, etc. may cause the question to surface with a greater intensity. We want to know what is next. What does the future hold?

The disciples may have had their own plans for tomorrow. They had ideas of where they would serve in Christ's kingdom. They had thought of positions of leadership in the new government they might hold. Two wanted to be seated at the right and left of him! These thoughts or plans all changed in a few hours on Good Friday. Whatever their plans were they did not include the trial and execution of their leader. This was not in their vision statement. It was in Christ's but they failed to comprehend or read that part!

We, too, wonder what is next. There are books out on how to control our lives, how to take charge of our own future. We want to know. Our fear comes in what might happen next. I came across this quote this week, "I have suffered many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened." How true are those words.

The Psalmist gives us some direction about tomorrow – delight in the presence of God. Look at history to see how God has moved in creation. Great and wonderful are the works of our God. This Psalm is a praise hymn to God who has been with us yesterday, who is with us today and who will be with us tomorrow. We are urged to trust in the one who does know tomorrow. Notice the conclusion, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.*" God keeps the promises of God – God's works are awesome. If we rely on God then all will be well. Remember the hymn, "Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow and I know who holds my hand." This is the Psalmist's confidence and this should be ours.

But we continue to worry. We wonder, "What next?" If we only knew what was going to happen we could be prepared. What might be always haunts us in some way. The possibilities are endless but so is the limitless potential of our God. Peter and John returned home wondering, "What next?" What does this mean to our lives? The lives of those who have followed Jesus? What next?

A recent book from two professors at Fuller Seminary is entitled: Church Next. It is selling because they are offering a glimpse into what they project church might be like in the coming years. We want know so we can plan for what types of outreach and evangelism would be effective for the building of Christ's church. But, already some of their predictions have not come to realization... the church seems to be heading in a different direction. God is moving in a new way. Our God has a way – new things are possible.

As they gathered in the upper room a few nights before, their plans did not include Good Friday. As they mourned on Saturday, their plans did not include Resurrection Sunday. As we come to this Table of our Lord we are reminded that we don't know what is next, but we do know the one who does.