

Heirs of the resurrection (Luke 24:36-48)

The first disciples experienced Jesus' resurrection not as some single triumphant fait accompli, but by fits and starts.

by [Cynthia G. Lindner](#) in the [April 21, 2009](#) issue

When read in its entirety, Luke's 24th chapter tells the story of Christ's resurrection in much the same way that we as parents and family members narrate the birth of a child. Though we have prepared for the arrival of the new family member, the onset of labor announces that nothing will be as we've imagined. We've packed the overnight bag and placed it in the front hall closet, ready for a trip to the hospital. We've made provisions for the house, the pets and the children.

But when the pains begin we are surprised at the complete and utter disruption of life-as-usual. We are at work, taking a walk or running an errand when we feel the first unmistakable, insistent contraction—an ancient and time-honored communication signaling that our plans have been pushed aside, that something larger and stronger is in charge, that while we might be able someday to tell this story, we are hardly in charge of its unfolding. The birth will occur—not neatly, logically or in straightforward fashion, but in messy waves of fear and pain, plateaus of waiting and spikes of recognition and joy that culminate in new life: the child's, and our own.

New life never slips in the back door quietly or painlessly. Every birth is only the beginning of a lifetime of these powerfully disorienting moments, as infants become fully persons and make their mark on the world. So it is with this resurrection life, as it unfolds in Luke and courses on through the story of the church in Luke's book of Acts. At the outset, the disciples seem resigned to Jesus' death. The women prepare their spices and tend the body; the followers of Jesus expect to learn to live with their losses, as sufferers of violence have always done. From the very first breath of the 24th chapter, however, that old tired script is challenged. Luke's account of the resurrection begins with a powerful disruption in the form of a single three-letter

word: *but*.

When the women arrive at the tomb, intent on their errand of mourning and closure, the sealing stone has been dislodged. The body's gone, and shining strangers announce that Jesus is risen, challenging them to remember that their teacher had tried to prepare them for this day. The women's sorrow contracts sharply and hope gives a sharp kick: the good news of the Christ—God's abundant life and love, stronger than any death—is about to thrust its way into the world yet again. The delivery is not without its complications, of course—the first to hear the women's nascent witness do not receive the gift of new life gladly; dislocation and disbelief alternate with amazement and awe.

Resurrection's second birthing wave takes place later that afternoon, first along the road to Emmaus and then at a table set with bread and wine—another round of resignation, recognition and surging hope.

Finally, near the conclusion of this “first day of the week,” resurrection makes its third and most forceful push: Jesus himself appears to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, eases their rising fear and doubt with a revealing of hands and feet and a bite of fish, opens their minds to understand what his presence among them means and sets resurrection loose in the world, naming these disciples as “witnesses of these things,” and promising to send them out with news of repentance and forgiveness, as agents of new life.

The first disciples experienced Jesus' resurrection—and their own rebirth as church—not as some single triumphant fait accompli, but by fits and starts, in hours of doubt and moments of exhilaration, with days of numbness and mourning punctuated by brief moments of holy presence and powerful certainty. Their story is indeed good news for the spaces and places in our own world in which enduring evidence of the resurrection's reign seems to be in short supply.

Two thousand years after Christ's crucifixion, when our violence toward one another has not abated, a collapsing economy exposes the depths and dangers of our own commodification, and our churches doubt their inheritance and their power, we may determine that we are still beyond resurrection's reach. But—and there are those three letters once again—Luke's Gospel points out that it's precisely when we've pronounced hope dead and prepared the spices for burial that the birth pangs announcing new life are likely to commence.

We make pilgrimage to the tomb of some long-dead dream or desire, only to be surprised by the contractions of resurrection: hope still stirs. We glance up from our daily commute and our eyes meet the eyes of a stranger who nods in a moment of holy recognition: the birth pangs of resurrection, once again. We clasp the weathered hand of an aging loved one or playfully count the toes of a toddler; our hearts break and our hands open when we hear that oh-so-human and oh-so-divine request, “Do you have anything to eat?” We break bread around cafeteria tables, soup kitchen tables, dining room tables, communion tables—and our minds are opened to understand ourselves and our place in the world yet again. We are, all of us, children and heirs of the resurrection—which is God’s affirmation that creation matters, that love and justice matter, that humanity, in all of its ambiguity and complexity, is still fearfully and wonderfully God-made. We are evidence of Christ’s continuing in-breaking, of the resurrection which was and is and is to come.