

Easter Day
March 31, 2013
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Nonsense

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

For more than 2000 years, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has been debated, argued, doubted and rationalized. But there are two details in the story that cannot be denied or debated or disproved. First, the tomb was empty. Jesus' dead body was not there in the place it had been secured three days earlier. Second, the first witnesses of this mystery were women, one or more. The number of women varies from gospel to gospel.

St. John tells us that Mary Magdalene first discovered the empty tomb. It was still dark. She went alone. Matthew records Mary being joined by the "other Mary," presumably the "mother of James." Mark adds a third woman to the list, Salome. In the narrative from Luke we just read, the two Mary's are listed with "Joanna...and the other women..." So, Luke tells us that there were at least five women, maybe more, who first witnessed the Resurrection.

Easter always begins with these women. They are the first witnesses, the first to report the empty tomb. We skip over this text too easily, especially given the status of women in the first century and the role of women in the Church for almost 2000 years! Yet these women show us the first meaning of Easter – two qualities we can attribute to their most important part in the Resurrection – persistence and courage.

The women went back to the tomb early on the first day of the week to finish the job, complete the anointing of Jesus' dead body. There wasn't enough time on Friday. Darkness approached soon after Joseph of Arimathea placed the body into the tomb. The women had to wait until the festival was over. Their persistence shows us accountability, responsibility, action. The women show us how important it is to finish what is started. They affirm the last word of Jesus from the cross according to St. John, "It is finished..." (19:30).

The women also show us great courage. They could have been identified as sympathizers, followers of Jesus. They could have been arrested and executed. They risked their lives by going to the tomb. How would they confront the soldiers guarding the tomb? What would they say to them? And how would they move the huge stone in front of the tomb? Perhaps Luke gets it right by telling us five or more women went. It would take that many to move the stone. Isn't courage finding the strength to do what we thought was impossible? Easter is first an acclamation of persistence and courage.

Luke also tells us about the very special messages the two angels shared with the women:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

"Remember..." (what Jesus told you about his passion and death, weeks, months ago, even back in Galilee...?)

So we come to Easter with these women hoping to let go of all that is dead and embrace the living, the new. Why is it so hard for us to let go of the past, the dead? Why are we haunted by

the dead, our memories, nightmares? What guilt, anxiety and unresolved conflicts/issues do we hold on to? The angels say, “*Let go...*” Follow the risen Lord...He is not here...Let go, but also remember...

Remember Jesus’ teachings; remember how God’s love has strengthened you in the past. Remember that God’s will for you is always supported by God’s love for you. Remembering is such a major factor in believing. Moses asks Israel to remember. The Book of Deuteronomy is the call to remember – slavery in Egypt, the Passover, the Red Sea, the 40 long years in the wilderness, liberation and settling in the Promised Land. Remember who you are. Remember whose you are. This Easter we’re called to embrace the living, the future. And we are called to remember God’s love for us.

In the film *Jesus of Nazareth*, Franco Zeffirelli combines details from all four Gospels. He shows us Peter remembering after Mary Magdalene comes and tells the disciples, “*I have seen the Lord!*” The report of the Resurrection begins with Mary knocking on the door of the house where all the disciples are hiding. She enters the room and reports all she’s experienced. She looks into the faces of the men and they are disbelieving. They think she’s crazy. She leaves, slams the door, and the men start mocking her. Finally the disciples turn to Peter; he is in the shadows; he doesn’t feel very good about his own betrayals, denials. One disciple asks him, “*Do you believe her?*” Peter slowly looks up and says, “*Yes.*”

“*But you denied him...three times...*” “*Yes, but I believe her because everything happened the way the Master said it would...*” Peter remembered and believed.

Luke is the only one to tell us the disciples didn’t believe the women. In this translation we read, “*These words seemed to them an idle tale...*” I don’t think this term “*idle tale*” is a strong enough translation. Others use “*sheer imagination.*” The one that best fits is “*nonsense.*” The disciples thought the reports of Jesus rising from the dead were “*nonsense.*” In fact, the ancient Greek word is actually a medical term (not surprising since we believe Luke was a physician) meaning the babbling speech of one who was insane, mad, completely out of their mind.

For more than 2000 years, many have thought that the Resurrection is nonsense. You and I know better. We have known new, risen life. We have been with our loved ones through their physical deaths. We know love is stronger than death. We know our loved ones have passed from this life into God’s eternity, with the everlasting community surrounding them, waiting for us. We know when physical life ends a new spiritual life begins.

We know this is not an idle tale, it is the truth. Easter is persistence and courage. Easter is seeking the living, the new, always. Easter is remembering God’s love and knowing God is with us. Easter is the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death.

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

Acts 10:34-43
Colossians 3:1-4
Luke 24:1-12