

Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Evidently expecting to find Jesus' corpse, some of his women followers go to the tomb with embalming spices. After a perplexing encounter with the empty tomb and angelic visitors, the women become the first to proclaim the amazing news of resurrection.

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Easter always reminds me that I need much more than a helping hand. I need a resurrection from the dead. Anything less is beside the point.

And so, thank God Easter has dawned. As far as I am concerned, you can forget hiding eggs, forget the ham and scalloped potatoes, forget the after dinner game of "uppers" [if you don't know what this is, you are better off], forget the Easter parade, but don't forget the jelly beans, especially the black ones: just take my hand and raise me from the dead. Give me the risen Jesus, and I will be ok.

Recently I took my young adult sons to lunch. On the way home from the local eatery, we drove past the cemetery of St. Andrew's Lutheran Church. "Why are you going this way?" asked the youngest. "Because it's the shortest route," I said. "Yeah, but I don't like going by all those dead people. It gives me the creeps," he said. "What have you got against the dead?" I said. "Are you prejudiced against them? Some of my favorite people are dead." Like the apostles in this morning's gospel, he considered this an "idle tale."

In his lifetime, and especially as told in Luke's gospel, Jesus was criticized for being friends with tax collectors and prostitutes. You know, as the old timers say, "Bad company ruins good morals." Yet unlike us, Jesus wasn't partial. We should add this morning that he often befriended dead people! Now that's real diversity: rich and poor, pretty and plain, tall and short, clean and dirty, strong and weak, slow and fast, smart and stupid, *and because of Easter, dead or alive*. This is my kind of savior. Even when I am dead and gone, that's just when things get interesting for me! And for YOU, brothers and sisters! "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" ask the angles at the tomb.

I heard a good preacher once say that Jesus never met a corpse he didn't like. "Just be a good corpse," said the preacher, "and Jesus does the rest." Consider only Lazarus (John 11), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7) and the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5). In Jesus' presence, these folks simply sit or stand up then and there. Thus, Christ never meets any of us without bringing us out of nothing, dust and ashes, to the joy of Easter rising. The good news of our faith is that in order to be saved all you have to do is be dead. Because, *even if you want to*, Christ simply won't let you stay dead! Rise up, then.

It takes some scripture study and Sunday School reminders to be clear that resurrection is not the same as resuscitation (or reincarnation for that matter).

Understand this: Easter is not about coming back to life, some near death experience. Easter is not the last episode of the show *ER*, as it were, but the dawn of

the world to come. Resurrection means a New Creation, life out of dust and ashes, an “extreme makeover,” Easter edition, as I like to preach it. The prophet Isaiah says it well:

“I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.”

At Easter, in other words, you don’t come “back to life”; you enter a new existence altogether. With Christ in the lead, the grave becomes the gate to your new life. Words fail to tell of it, this new heaven and new earth. We can only sing of the feast of victory for our God.

This side of the grave, one of the few credible witnesses to the resurrection that made any gospel sense to me came from a parishioner in his nineties named Jacob Svaby. Immigrants from the old Czechoslovakia, he and his wife Mary were supremely devout.

Each Christmas when the church council went caroling, their home was the last stop of the evening. Jacob might offer a potent Slovenian plum brandy called slivovitz. Once his great nephew, who was council president, asked, “Jake are you afraid to die?” With a gentle but wry smile on his face, he said to us all, “Me no afraid. Nobody come back and complain yet.” Indeed, we don’t come back; we move ahead to a New Heaven and New Earth.

In my childishness, I like to think of my friend Jacob as one of those angelic men at the tomb who greeted the women that first Easter dawn, saying in chorus with them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

Sing it, then: Christ is arisen, and we shall arise, Alleluia!

AMEN

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