

The Day of Resurrection, 2012. Nigel Taber-Hamilton

What do you call a line of bunnies jumping backward together? “A receding “hare” line”

How do bunnies stay fit? “Egg-ercise” & “hare-robics”!

What do you get if you pour hot water down a rabbit hole? A “hot, cross bun-ny”!

“Enough with the bunny jokes” you say! But why do we have the Easter bunny? Because in the fall all north European rabbits seem to disappear – they were believed to have died, since no one when this mythic identity developed knew about hibernation! Then, in the spring, there are bunnies everywhere! So they represented both new life, and lots of it – a good metaphor for resurrection.

What happens if you live in a culture where there are no bunnies? Egypt, for instance? In the dry season, in the Nile basin, all the frogs disappear – many do die, but not after laying eggs. Come the rainy season, when the Nile floods, you get, first tadpoles, then millions of frogs – much like European bunnies. So let me ask you: what do you think the Egyptian Coptic Christians have as the equivalent of the Easter bunny? The Frog!! We’ll come back to bunnies later, but now lets turn to this day – the Day of Resurrection. Only in the English-speaking world is it called “Easter” – actually the name of an ancient, pagan God, “Eastre”. Everywhere else it’s called Pascha – the Christian Passover.

Today we’ve heard one of the four stories of the resurrection – have you ever noticed how – even with their similarities – they also all differ from one another?

- Mark, in his usual down to earth way, simply has “a young man” sitting on the top of the stone seal of the empty tomb, who tells the women that Jesus is risen and for them to tell “the disciples and Peter that he “is going before you to Galilee”. That’s pretty much where that gospel ends.
- Matthew has an “angel” (the Greek word “angelos” means “messenger”, so “divine messenger” would be the accurate moniker) in place of the young man, an angel whose appearance was “like lightning and his raiment white as snow.” Presiding over the empty tomb he also tells the women that Jesus “is going before you to Galilee” but only mentions “the disciples”, not “and Peter”. Then Jesus appears to them – the women – as they return to tell the disciples, and he gives them instructions as to how to proceed.
- Luke has “two men” in “dazzling apparel” who “stood by [the women]” outside the empty tomb and invite them to “remember what he told you” – no mention of Galilee, here, or of telling anyone, but that wonderful question: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” – a question that should always and everywhere echo through our lives in one form or another: why do we sometimes seek life in places of death? The first appearance of Jesus is on the Emmaus Road.
- John doesn’t mention anyone at the tomb at first – the women simply discover it empty. But while Peter and the Beloved Disciple are running around like chickens with their heads cut off Mary Magdalene sees two “angels in white”, and then, as she turns around, Jesus.

There are co-incidences. I don’t mean coincidences, but things that “co-incide”. The empty tomb

is one. The other is that all four gospels have the women discovering it, and in three of the four Jesus' first appearance is to the women. In Luke the gender of the couple to whom Jesus appears on the Emmaus Road is never mentioned, but the Greek would allow for them to be women, too. This should come as no surprise to us. Mark – the only gospel to take us through Holy Week day by day – describes for us on Wednesday the story of the woman with the alabaster jar (Luke and Matthew have the story too, though modified). The woman anoints Jesus for – as he describes it – “my burial”, and he concludes “wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” (14:9). Mark sandwiches this story between one of Judas' betrayal. His message is that she is the epitome of discipleship, whereas all the male disciples fail, with Judas' failure being the most egregious.

On Thursday – we now call it “Maundy Thursday” after the “love mandate” – we heard a passage only in John's gospel of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. That's work done by slaves, and, primarily female slaves.

On Friday, at the cross, Matthew and Mark both have Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph present, along with “other women”. Luke has them father off. John has Mary Magdalene with Jesus' mother, Mary, and the “Beloved Disciple”

Women are prominent – central – in stories about Jesus' death and resurrection. Where were the men? After Jesus' crucifixion they were....hiding.

Women had no social standing in the 1st Century – they could go places and do things men couldn't do because of that. Men, with social standing, were at risk – they were threats or examples – they had to hide if they wished to live.

In addition to the resurrection appearances Jesus' – through the whole week, and, for that matter, throughout his public ministry – modeled a form of discipleship that involved adopting the social position and roles filled by women. So when he called all the disciples – men as well – to lay aside any pretensions, lay aside any grasping to social position, and live a life that placed servanthood at the center they already knew what that looked like. The gospel writers largely got that message. We don't. One message of these resurrection stories is just that – servanthood is at the center.

Back to the bunnies! They became metaphors for Easter because of their fertility, and that's another reason why, I think, Jesus focused on women – as, later, did St. Paul – the genuine one, that is, not the “Paul” after whom some letters (like 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) are named, but who were clearly written by someone else.

Giving birth – I'm told! – is one of the most, if not the most remarkable experiences any woman can have. You're not in control of your body, it requires effort, often significant pain, and when you're done your world changes forever. If you can't deal with that initial change – or all the many changes that follow-on as a result – then motherhood is going to be mighty difficult! Giving birth is one of THE transformational experiences of living.

If you can handle that, then you're on your way to handling the transformative nature of Christian faith, where you're not in control, where it requires effort, where it can be painful, and where the world is forever different. Because that's what Christian faith is about: transformation. That's certainly what this day is about, AND that's part of what we're celebrating today: that not only can we be changed by this experience but we will be, if we allow it.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen; he is risen indeed: and we – if we choose – will rise with him. Amen.