

Not Yet Easter

I realize that we have already said and sung that Christ is risen, but that is not my reading of the Gospel Lesson. I want to stay with the women and the other disciples, and for them we are not yet at full Easter. All we have is an empty tomb and a bunch of people wandering around perplexed, terrified, amazed, and unbelieving. An empty tomb - it more likely means we've got the wrong grave, or if it is the right grave, then someone stole the body. When's the last time you strolled through a cemetery, saw a freshly dug out grave, and said to yourself, "Wow, there must have been a resurrection!" Right.

Look, it was dark out. Anyone could go to the wrong tomb. They meant well, those women. They came with the right idea, out of love and respect for their dead friend and teacher. They came to finish the job that there wasn't time to do on the eve of the Sabbath, after that horrifying Friday, really, nothing Good about that day. They came with the proper spices for the anointing of his body. They came prepared for death, for death, I say, and even that had taken a lot of courage, for they had loved him, and this washing and anointing task would break their hearts again.

And just when you think things can't get any harder, sometimes they do. They found the stone tomb-cover rolled away and the burial chamber empty. Ah, now what? Are we in the right place? We saw where they buried him. This has to be it. What do we do with all these spices? All that work and no body! What will the other disciples think of us: we failed to complete this simple, basic task.

They stood there, the text says, deeply perplexed. And we should be standing there with them.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, two men in dazzling white suits (I suppose that's so we would know that they are the good guys) appeared and stood beside them. The women were terrified and fell to their knees in fear and awe. How fair was that, frightening these good people who had only come to do their duty to their dead friend?

But then the dazzling guys asked the women a question, a question that made them look foolish, as if they'd brought party hats and kazoos to a funeral. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" . . . Uh, we're not. We are looking for the dead among the dead. Jesus is dead. We are prepared to deal with death. Where have you taken him?

But the bright guys said to them, "Don't you remember, weeks ago up in Galilee, when he told you and the others that he would be betrayed, crucified, and rise again?" . . . No, we only remember the bad parts, that he kept saying he was going to suffer and be killed. We felt Peter was right when he told Jesus, "No, Lord, this can't happen to you. You are the Messiah. You are supposed to win and not lose. We are supposed to win and not be losers." So, no, the rising after three days part? We remember that he said it, but we didn't get it. We don't get it.

But what if it is true? What if Jesus is alive? What if that's what this empty tomb means? And rushing from the tomb, they raced back to the disciples, who were still hiding for fear of being the next to be whacked and nailed, and the women told them what they had seen and heard. It was a whole bunch of women - Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary James' mom, and

several others. And they were telling all this to the men. “And these words seemed to them as humbug” - I looked it up in the best Greek lexicon - the word means humbug. Bah, humbug! - “and they did not believe them.”

You see, that's what I am saying: an empty tomb can mean anything. Mostly bad things. There is, of course, that razor thin, and I am not talking about one of those bulky new-fangled, six-bladed Gillette razors, but one of those old thin double-edged blades that you had to drop carefully into your razor. There is that razor thin edge of hope that . . . Well, who could believe it, really? Not the disciples.

Peter, for whatever reason, got up - he was always impetuous - and ran to the tomb. He too looked in. He saw the original linen cloths the very dead Jesus had been wrapped in, just laying there by themselves. Huh? If you were stealing a body, why would you unwrap it. Well, Peter was no CSI. But that sure didn't make sense. Hmph?

Then it says he went home, amazed, perplexed, astounded, confused. And maybe that's a good place to end this story: in amazement, in wondering, and in honest **doubt**. After all, no one rises from the dead, do they? Not even a good man like Jesus. So go ahead and sing about it, if you want. . . . But I won't believe it . . . at least not until I see (look at hands) . . . at least not until tomorrow.

So be it.