

Easter Vision– Luke 24:1-12
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – Easter Sunday (March 31) 2013

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Risen indeed!

All over Christendom, on today, that is the call and response echoed over and over. **Christ is risen! Alleluia! Risen indeed!**

We’ve come a long way since that first Easter.

When the women came back into the city after their experience at the empty tomb, THEY WERE BELIEVERS in the Resurrection. They went straight to the MALE DISCIPLES, and gave them the good news.

But the result was not exactly as Mary, Joanna, the other Mary and others expected. The MALE disciples, we are told in verse 11, did not believe them. They thought that their words were an “idle tale.”

The word translated as “idle Tale” in today’s Gospel lesson is “LAYROS.”

A more accurate translation, albeit it a bit more scatological, would be – as explained to me by a preaching professor from Yale University, Dr. Tom Troeger – “Bull!” Actually, as Dr. Troeger explained it: ***That’s not quite it either. Think of a middle school student coming out of the shower after gym class and encountering the wrapped up towel of another student coming into rapid contact with his naked back side, and the stricken student would shout out the word: “Layros!”***

Oh, we ought not be too hard on those disciples. They’d been through quite a bit over the past 72 hours, and if you’ve never encountered the death of your leader and best friend, then been afraid that you were going to be the

next victim of the Roman/coopted Jewish power cabal, and finally having a bunch of women tell you that someone had returned from the grave, and not merely as a ghost, then you can't really say you've walked in their shoes.

What are the tests that you use to determine if something is True, is Real?

- common sense – which is nothing more or less than what most people commonly believe ____
- What we expect, based on common experience. I am amazed at how complicated and discombobulated communication gets because of this. It's like the woman, who encountered so many problems was invited by the church member to come to church. She responded, ***“With all the mistakes I've made in my life, and all the problems I've encountered, the last thing I need is to go to church and hear them tell me how bad I am.”*** People tend to see and hear what they expect to see and hear, regardless of what is actually shown or spoken to them. ____
- We expect to experience something that is consistent with our previously formed opinion. Even if something else is better news. Even if something else will make our life better. We tend to see life through the keyhole of self-justification. Some people are just never able to get over seeing all of life with them in the role of victim, because that is how they have come to define themselves. Something else may be true, but they simply can't make it their reality, because they explain life by a misguided notion of fatalistic victimhood. ____

Can you think of a time when you were surprised by discovering that something you thought was not real was, in fact, true?

It's sometimes hard for us to let go of old realities, in the face of the truth. **I still have a very hard time accepting the facts that coyotes can run 43 mph and Road Runners can only run up to 20 m.p.h. All those years I was indoctrinated by the cartoon to believe that Wile E. Coyote was slower than Roadrunner!**

So what was it that enabled these women to see their experience outside the box, and to make them believe in the Resurrection?

- a. At first they were **SURPRISED, FRIGHTENED**. So much so, they had to let go of their expectations. The old paradigm just did not work any more.
- b. They were given this **EXTRAORDINARY EXPLANATION** – the living are not among the dead
- c. Then they were reminded **THAT JESUS HAD TOLD THEM IT WOULD BE THIS WAY**. Even though they had not really understood it at the time. They remembered now what He said then.
- d. That **FAITH IN JESUS**, coupled with the explanation of what was in front of their face [or more accurately NOT in front of their face] changed how they saw life, death, and everything

Atheist and Academic, Church hating author and professor, Richard Dawkins says that *“the universe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”*

In his 2006 book *The God Delusion*, Dawkins contends that *a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist and that religious faith is a delusion—“a fixed false belief.”* As of January 2010, the English-language version had sold more than two million copies and had been translated into 31 languages.

A year ago, a tsunami slapped into one of the islands of Japan with the velocity of a passenger jet, snapping railroad tracks and

scattering ships, houses, and airplanes across the ravaged landscape.

In its wake, with 19,000 dead and whole villages swept away, a busy nation with scant time for theological questions could think of little else.

Can we still remember how Sarajevo, the city in Bosnia and Herzegovina went four years without heat and electricity and with little food and water as it endured the longest siege in modern warfare. Ten thousand residents died from daily sniper fire and grenades and mortars that fell from the sky like hail.

Do you remember how just 2 weeks before this past Christmas all of America was paralyzed by the tragedy of the one person war waged in Newtown, Connecticut that led to the murder of 20 schoolchildren and 6 teachers and staff?ⁱ

There are too many people in the world today, who would agree with Richard Dawkins's explanation of all these events – simply that *“the universe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”*

Not believing in anything other than themselves, they arm themselves with guns, making them their hope for salvation.

There are people in the world today, and here in Charleston, and here in this Church today, who are dealing with pain, and suffering, and illness, and uncertainty, and fear.

To us who believe in the RESURRECTION, we are not left with

- The NO HOPE
- The NOTHING TO HOLD ON TO
- The ABSOLUTE EMPTINESS of

the random chance of *“nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”*

The sad thing is that our telling of the Truth and the Power of the Resurrection never gives them the Hope that we have. They have to get their own faith, their own relationship with God through Jesus. Like Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish virgins, they have to have their own. Our faith cannot be theirs. They have to have their own.

ALL WE CAN DO IS TELL THEM THE STORY.

The women could not make the men believe. All they could do was to tell them the story. They had to encounter the living Christ themselves, before they claimed it as their own story. It was not the result of nagging women, but of their own Jesus encounter that led every single one of them to die a martyr’s death, except John who was sent into exile on Patmos.

They may even think we are full of LAYROS. But that makes it no less TRUE.

- Tsunamis,
- Sarajevos,
- Newtowns,
- Bad News from the doctor,
- Broken relationships with people we trusted

These and so many more things ARE GOING to come our way.

But we Easter People:

- May at first really be SURPRISED, FRIGHTENED.
- But then we **REMEMBER THAT JESUS HAD TOLD US THAT RESURRECTION IS REAL! GOD MAKES A WAY WHERE THE WORLD SAYS “NO WAY!” AND NOTHING IN ALL CREATION WILL EVER BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD. NOTHING.**
- And -- while we may not today understand how much that means -- our **FAITH IN JESUS** will make us understand what Jesus meant, when the

times comes and we need it to get through. We can see God working for our good through even these things. We have a vision that mere optimism cannot touch.

My sisters and brothers, the Word of God must always be TRUE.

The Truth is that we live in a world where less and less people have faith.

The Truth is that we live in a world where fewer and fewer people turn to Christ and His Church.

The Truth is that we MUST never let go of what we know, of what we believe, of what we are able to see - even if they tell us it's LAYROS.

Neither must we ever water down the Gospel of Jesus to be some "entertainment only" just to try to be acceptable to the masses.

The Truth is **Christ is risen! Alleluia! Risen indeed!**

- **God is in charge!**
- **We must understand God's story, and share the story.**
- **The story is our Heritage.**
- **The story is our Power.**
- **The story is our Future.**

Even when they tell us it's LAYROS, we Easter people are able to see something True that will never let us down.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Risen indeed!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ From descriptions given in ***Christianity Today* article "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb" by Philip Yancey.**