

A blessed Easter season to all of you! Kate's sermon, given on Sunday based on Luke 24:1-12, reminds us that the resurrection is not some "idle tale!" And it still continues among us....

The life of Jesus began with angels appearing to shepherds on a hillside bearing good tidings. Not only good tidings, but astonishing news about God living and breathing on this earth in the form of a newborn. And now as the women come at the end of his life to anoint Jesus' body, we again have angels bearing astonishing news. He is not here! He is risen! The shepherds went on to share their amazing story, the light in the night, the child in the manger. The women go to share their wonder with the remaining disciples, figures in dazzling clothes, an **empty tomb**.

Well, I tell you this. I hope the shepherds got a better reception than did the women. Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, and the others have just had an angelic visitation, and upon sharing it, the apostles dismiss them summarily – calling it “an **idle tale**.” Perhaps their grief has addled their brains. After all, these are the very same women who stood by Jesus and suffered every blow with him just hours ago. They must be hallucinating. Peter, however, who has been grieving bitterly since his own denial of Jesus, does something else. He runs to the tomb to check it out. Now, there was a time when I might have made this a man-woman thing. Of course, the men didn't believe the women, do they ever? And though there may have been some truth to that, this is not what I see anymore. The Easter proclamation and this day is not about who listens to who, or who goes to the tomb and who doesn't. This day is about amazing news. Astonishing and incredible news. What Shakespeare would call **the "wondrous strange."**

The Easter story is truly mind boggling. A human being who was tortured, crucified, and buried before the eyes of a crowd is now risen, alive, and walking the earth. There is no scientific proof for any of it. It makes no logical sense. This story certainly doesn't pass the test of empirical evidence. In fact, isn't it amazing that we still tell it? Ever since the Enlightenment, the era in which science became God and reason its primary servant, haven't we gotten beyond all that? And in today's world in which money is

power and we live and die by the almighty dollar, stories such as these are at best idle tales to some and complete fabrications to others. Why bother with them? They only fill our heads with crazy notions and you certainly are not going to become rich on them! And, come on now, **you certainly don't believe** all this stuff, do you?

Well, no, I don't...that is if you are asking if I believe in the Resurrection in the same way I believe the earth is round. Now, I do not experience the roundness of the earth in my everyday life, but I have seen enough pictures and learned enough science to **believe** that it is true. So, I live my days with that snippet of knowledge filed somewhere in my brain, but honestly it doesn't affect my daily life a whole lot. The Resurrection, though, is something different. Something that I live with every day, have experienced, not only heard about, and know in my bones. It is not an intellectual knowing or even a doctrine of belief for me. Actually, the church made a huge wrong turn in the centuries following the birth of Christianity when it tried to systematize and shrink into belief what is primarily a **transformative experience**, the wondrous strange experience of the risen Christ. It sapped the living truth right out of it. But that is a sermon for another day.

Today is about Mary, Joanna, Mary Magdalene and the other women whose love for Jesus crushed their spirits on Friday. Today is about Peter whose shame and grief overwhelmed him after abandoning his beloved in his time of trial. Hearts are torn apart and aching, having been intimately touched by death. And now, returning to the place of death, down at the bottom of that deep, dark place, a light **suddenly shines**. Like the stone rolled away from the tomb, a dead weight lifts off their spirits. There is no physical manifestation of Jesus in this story, but already there is a budding transformation. This transformation – from terror, to hope, to amazement, to wonder – begins with the dawning awareness that the most impenetrable darkness holds light. The grave is not only a place of

endings, but a place of beginnings. In fact, they are indistinguishable.

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Neither the women nor Peter understand it. They could **not** have told you at that moment **what they believed** about it, what they **thought** had happened. They did not have words to recite like we do – “I believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified, died, and was buried. And on the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures.” And thank God they didn’t, or they might have all gone back home, confirmed in their belief, but unchanged. They could not express in words what happened to them that day when **grief collided with profound love and resulted in an eruption of light**. At that moment, the Easter proclamation “Christ is risen!” was not so much about Jesus as it was about what was happening in them. Hope, wonder, joy rising inside, shared with one another, mysterious and inexplicable, but **more real** than anything else they had ever known.

Why do we still tell this story? Not so that you will walk away today confirmed in your belief about Resurrection. I tell you, that won’t get you anywhere! It won’t change you, it won’t lift you, and it won’t sustain you in this world of challenge and trial. We tell this story because of the fact that **transformation did occur and still occurs** in life when grief collides with profound love. It takes you apart. It brings you to your knees. It questions all that you ever held true. And then,

just as you are ready to give up, a light shines. Angels appear and begin to speak. You hear and see things you never had the capacity to before. You find others who have heard and seen similar things and share your startling news. Something stirs in the grave. Something strong and hopeful and **infinitely loving** rises within you. The relationship between life and death shifts. No longer do they appear opposites. And as your heart expands to hold them both, the living Christ appears offering peace.

Christ is risen today – in every place where love and grief come together to dispel darkness! Christ is risen today – in Peter whose shame and agony opened him to the light of God’s love and turned him into the most compassionate of men. Christ is risen today – in the women, in **all** women, whose tears continue to water the hard ground they walk preparing it for the greening and new life of spring. Christ is risen today – even in Newtown, Connecticut, where the most unfathomable grief still collides with profound love, and one by one, two by two, stories are being shared, testimonies given, and plans being made for life lived at a new depth and dimension, with a new purpose, as the angels begin to speak.

Christ is risen today – **even** in the promise of transformations to come – unbelievable, inexplicable transformations rising out of places of violence, injustice, and pain. The cross can do its worst...but in the glaring light of God’s love, graves just do not hold. They are not now, nor have ever been the last word. I know this in my bones, having looked into a very dark place, and found myself held in the light. I do not believe, but I know, that Christ is risen, risen indeed! Listen for the angels! Christ rises still today. Amen. Alleluia.

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