

“Empty!”
Luke 24:1-12

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Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they 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.

Last week we dyed Easter eggs in our home.

Two dozen hardboiled eggs
dipped and double dipped in various colors
—some with crayon writing and drawing,
some just pure color,
others with a more tie-dye effect...
I think it was still about 26 degrees outside
when we did this,
but that batch of eggs sitting there,
drying on the kitchen table
—it looked like
the promise of spring itself
—**defiantly colorful and bright.**

This congregation this morning has that look about it
—that wonderful look
of a bunch of brightly colored eggs.

Good eggs, to be sure.

Easter morning bows, ties, and ribbons,
dresses, suits, and a bonnet or two...

What a great day to rejoice
with **life** and **spring**, **joy** and **promise!**

What a day to proclaim **the empty tomb**
and the **resurrection of Jesus Christ!**

But of course,
that empty tomb might be easier for us to celebrate today
than it was for Mary Magdalene,

Joanna,
Mary the mother of James,
and the others who were with them.

These women had arrived
that first Easter morning
to do what mourners did at that time
—to anoint the body,
to tend the grave.

They were there, understandably,
because where else was there for them to go?

It was over!

Whoever Jesus was,
whatever he did,
however he made them feel...

it was all over,
and his betrayal,
arrest,
torture,
and horrific death

left them numb

—paralyzed with grief.

If they were here today,
we might label their condition

as **“post-traumatic stress disorder.”**

How could it be anything else?

What word,

other than “trauma”

could sum up the weekend they’d just had?

The women arrived at the tomb.

And it was open!

The stone had been rolled away,
and they could walk right in!

Can you imagine what they were thinking?

I wonder what they thought
they were going to see in there

—if maybe they were bracing themselves
for something terrible...

“Who’s been in here?” they wondered.

Vandals?

Thieves?

Romans?

What did they do?

What did they take?

Suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

The women became doubly-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.”**

And so the women returned
to where the disciples were staying
and told them everything
—about the empty tomb,
and about what they had seen.

***But these words seemed to them
an idle tale, and they did not
believe them.***

Now we hear that and we think, **really, disciples?**

An idle tale?

These faithful women return from the tomb
and tell you that Jesus' body is missing
and that they met men in dazzling clothes
who informed them
that things have played out
in a way that is *strikingly similar*
to the way Jesus said they would
back when he was alive
and tried to get the message
through your thick skulls
that he would die and then rise again,

plus the eleven of you
have nothing better to do
than sit around and be *mopey* all day,
and yet you *still* dismiss
the women's story as an idle tale?

Only one, Peter, went to see for himself.

I wish the gospel included some dialog among the women
as they left these **hapless** men
and chatted about which was *more* empty
—Christ's tomb **or the disciples heads**.

But sometimes, friends,
we struggle to see and believe the truth we've been hoping for,
even when it's right in front of us.

We want to take control of our lives,
but then sometimes our own power scares us.

We want to believe in ourselves,
but when we realize
that the possibilities really are endless,
we get overwhelmed.

We want to make a difference,
but faced with the sacrifices involved,
we shy away.

So with **self-imposed limitations**
and **home-grown excuses**,
we *blind* ourselves
from recognizing *the very things we wish we could see*.

Marianne Williamson wrote,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light,
not our darkness,
that most frightens us.”

Maybe that’s what happened with the disciples
when the women excitedly poured into the room
and told them,

“The tomb is empty! He has risen!”

Maybe it was *not* the darkness of grief that consumed them
—maybe it was the light
of everything that was now possible
because of the empty tomb
that stunned them with fear.

The empty tomb
and the light of everything that is now possible because of it
—that’ll have us living some extraordinary and perhaps
risky lives.

Another Easter story,
this one about a little girl

who was suffering from a disease
and needed blood from her five-year-old brother,
who had miraculously survived the same disease
and had developed the antibodies
needed to combat the illness.

The doctor explained the situation to her little brother,
and asked the boy
if he would be willing
to give his blood to his sister.

The boy hesitated for only a moment
before taking a deep breath and saying,
“Yes, I’ll do it if it will save my sister.”

As the transfusion progressed,
he lay in bed next to his sister
and smiled as he watched the color return to her cheeks.

But then his own face grew pale
and his smile faded.

He looked up at the doctor
and asked with a trembling voice,
“Will I start to die right away?”

Being young,
the boy had misunderstood;
he thought he was going to
have to give her *all* his blood.

That’s an empty tomb story!

*The empty tomb
and the light of everything that is now possible because of it
—that’ll have us living some extraordinary lives.*

*For the empty tomb cries out triumphantly
that death has lost its power
—that the last word belongs to life!*

The good news of Easter
is that the resurrection itself
was not simply a one-time event,
lodged in the biblical story of Jesus.
Rather, the Easter good news is this:
resurrection itself
is an all-consuming reality
that grabs us
and holds onto us
and will not let us go
until we can see
and believe
that everything is now different!
Death and decay,
loss and brokenness
—it all must reckon
with the wonderful truth
of a tomb that is **EMPTY!**

Our celebration today is not just
about accepting a resurrection that happened 2,000 years ago.
It's also about living into the reality
of resurrection today
—in your life,
in your marriage,
in your parenting and grandparenting,
in your work,
in your commitments,
in your sense of purpose in this world...

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THE EMPTY TOMB

and for its proclamation

that even death

could not contain the one

*who we have come to know as Love, **Jesus the Christ.***

AND THANKS BE TO GOD

that our own lives are wrapped up

in the light of everything that is now possible,

for Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed!

Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we are grateful for the empty tomb and grateful to be loved with a love that is beyond us—beyond our deserving, yes, but more fully, beyond our senses, beyond our wisdom, beyond even our ability to believe or respond. This is your love for us in Christ Jesus our risen Lord, and we are thankful. May your joy and grace in us be so uncontainable that we are empowered to live in light of your resurrection power. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Let us stand and sing hymn #106 – “Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks”