

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

An empty cross on the hill called Golgotha
An empty tomb cut into the side of a rock
The women’s testimonies . . .

Is it evidence enough to convince the world
Jesus was crucified and died on Friday
And on Sunday he rose from the dead?

It’s surprising, in a way
That God chose to share the Resurrection quietly.

Have you ever thought about that?

I mean wouldn’t God wanted to make the Resurrection
As spectacular an event as possible?

Show the world who Jesus is, God!
Show the world You raised him from the grave!

If I was God’s Communications Director
I’d want to make as big a splash as possible!

But he didn’t, leaving countless many to call it, “fake news”.

At this point in our story . . .

All we have is an empty cross on a hill
Declaring his death
And an empty tomb declaring his resurrection!

~

Carolyn Arends in an article for Kyria.com
Shared an insight she received from her pastor.

She writes, “A couple of years ago during a jubilant Easter service our pastor said something that stopped me in my mental tracks: ‘The world

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

offers promises full of emptiness.’ ‘But Easter offers emptiness full of promise!’”

Empty cross
 Empty tomb
 Empty grave clothes
 All filled with promise.

~~

After the arrest of Jesus, the disciples fled and hid.

You can’t blame them.

The authorities considered them insurrectionists
 And they could have been arrested with Jesus
 And crucified alongside of him.

The women who ministered to Jesus and the disciples
 Remained there throughout that Friday.

They witnessed those last torturous hours of his life.

Matthew 27:55-56 (CEV)

⁵⁵ Many women had come with Jesus from Galilee to be of help to him, and they were there, looking on at a distance. ⁵⁶ Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were some of these women.

~~

They crucified Jesus on Friday.

According to Jewish tradition
 A new day begins when the sun sets
 Rather than when the sun rises like us.

And so the Sabbath began when the sun set on Friday eve

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

And they needed to get Jesus buried before then.

So Jesus was taken down from the cross
And hastily buried before dark on Friday.

According to Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea
Asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

He then went and buried him in his own unused tomb
All the while the women in the background.

Matthew 27:61 (CEV)

⁶¹ All this time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb

Since Saturday was the Sabbath
The women had to wait until Sunday
The first day of the week
To properly finish the rites of burial.

~~

Jesus died around 3:00 PM on Friday.

And so from the time of Jesus’ death
To Sunday morning when the women went to the tomb
Thirty-nine hours passed.

Now I’m not sure what happens to a body
In that kind of climate over a thirty-nine hour period
. . . but it can’t be good.

And the beating Jesus received
And the wounds on his wrists and feet
And the wound on his side had to be terrible.

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

I can't imagine unwrapping the linen from the corpse
Washing his wounded body
Rubbing embalming spices on him
And rewrapping him.

It would have been the most ghastly of tasks
These faithful women would have had to endure.

But they went that morning determined to see it through.

~~

Even though Jesus predicted he would be killed
And in three days he would rise
No one, not even the women, believed it.

Really, how could you believe something like that?

The women did not go to the tomb
Thinking there would be a resurrection!

They did not go thinking the tomb would be empty!

In fact, from another gospel account
They went wondering how they would move the stone!

They went prepared to put spices on a decomposing body!

And what they found gave them the shock of their lives!
Rather than finding the dead body of Jesus . . .
They found an empty tomb.

They found the stone rolled away
And an angel nonchalantly sitting it.

Matthew 28:5-6 (CEV)

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to a cross. ⁶ He isn’t here! God has raised him to life, just as Jesus said he would. Come, see the place where his body was lying.

Empty cross
 Empty tomb
 Emptiness full of promise.

~~

I share a story entitled *Philip’s Egg*
 Written by the Rev. Harry Pritchett, Jr.

Pritchett had a young friend named Philip.

Philip had Down’s Syndrome.

Philip went to Sunday school as a third-grader
 With nine other boys and girls
 At Pritchett’s United Methodist Church.

“But Philip was not really a part of the group.
 He did not choose nor did he want to be different.
 He just was. And that was just the way things were.”

During Easter, the Sunday school teacher
 Came up with a class project.

He had collected those containers that pantyhose comes in
 Those that looked like big eggs.

He had collected ten of them.

He had the eggs in the Sunday school room
 When the kids came that Easter Sunday.

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

It was a beautiful spring day and he told the kids
That their assignment was to go outside
And find something to put inside the egg.

They were to put something inside the egg
That reminded them of Easter, a symbol of new life.

The kids thought it a great idea.

They ran around the churchyard that warm spring day
Collecting things to put inside their eggs.

When they returned, they put their eggs on the table.

The teacher opened one, and there was a flower
And everyone ooh-ed and aah-ed.

He opened another, and there was a little butterfly
More oohing and aahing!

He opened another, and there was a rock.

And as third-graders will do, some laughed
And some said, “That's crazy!”
“How's a rock supposed to be like new life?”

But the little boy who'd found it spoke up: “That's mine.”

“And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds,
And leaves and butterflies and stuff like that.”

“So I got a rock because I wanted to be different.
And for me, that's new life.”

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

They all laughed.

The teacher, then, opened the next one.

There was nothing inside of it.

“The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said . . .

‘That’s not fair—that’s stupid!—somebody didn’t do it right.’”

“Then the teacher felt a tug on his shirt

And he looked down.

Philip was standing beside him. ‘It’s mine’

Philip said. ‘It’s mine.’

And the children said, ‘You don’t ever do things right, Philip.’

‘There’s nothing there! That’s stupid!’

‘I did so do it,’ Philip said.

‘I did do it. It’s empty.

The tomb is empty!’”

~~

And with that, a miracle happened.

The rest of the kids included Philip as one of their own.

They no longer looked at him as different.

He became a part of the group.

From that moment, he was set free

From the tomb of his differentness.

~~

A short while later Philip died.

His family knew since the time he was born

That he wouldn’t live long.

“Emptiness Full of Promise”

He died from an infection most normal children
Could have quickly shrugged off.

“At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children
Marched up to the altar
Not with flowers to cover over
The stark reality of death.”

“Nine eight-year-olds,
With their Sunday school teacher
Marched right up to that altar

And laid on it an empty egg—
An empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.”

~~

The world offers promises . . . full of emptiness.

But Easter offers emptiness full of promise!

Empty cross
Empty tomb
Empty grave clothes
All filled with promise.