

Luke 24.1-12
The Other Side of Darkness
WRCoB 4.4.21

According to Jewish tradition
Jesus was not given proper burial.

On Friday, the day of his death
They quickly removed his body from the cross

So that it wouldn't be left there to hang
Through the Passover holiday.

After Joseph of Arimathea offered his family tomb
They hastily wrapped Jesus' broken body
And placed him in the tomb
Before the sun went down.

Very early on the first day of the week, Sunday
The women followers of Jesus went to the tomb
To properly prepare Jesus' body for burial.

A ghastly task reserved for only the strongest.

And so, it fell to the women followers of Jesus
The men most notably absent.

In the Jewish tradition
The custom of preparing a body for burial
Fell to the family of the deceased.

But it appears that Mary, the mother of Jesus
Was perhaps the only family member involved.

In Luke's account, the women discover the empty tomb.

Two angels appear and proclaimed

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

“He is not here: He is risen!”

When the women returned
With this startling news

The men thought it an idle tale, fake news.

Even Peter, who after hearing the women
Ran back to the tomb to see for himself
Left, wondering what had happened.

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It seems right to me
That Jesus made his first appearance
To the faithful women followers.

Though the New Testament
Doesn't make a big deal out of their presence

They are there throughout the chronicles of Jesus' life
There from the very beginning to the end.

It seems most appropriate they were the first
To experience the Risen Lord.

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The accounts of Easter Sunday are brief.

None of the Gospel accounts
Take much more than 12 verses
To describe what happened.

And even then, the stories are not quite the same.

But what we can state fairly clearly is this.

That despite the rather brief and conflicting statements
Concerning Jesus' resurrection

It is clear that the empty tomb
Wasn't the proof that convinced the followers
That Jesus rose from the dead.

The empty tomb seems to simply cause
Alarm, confusion, and fear.

Instead, it was the personal encounters
The disciples had with the Risen Christ.

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I have reflected on today's message this week
Looking for a new angle, some new insight
Perhaps something not said before.

But I only come up with the realization
That no matter how you look at it
The message in the Easter story is the same.

With bold, glaring unapologetic simplicity
The message declares loudly

Jesus died on Friday
And on Sunday he rose from the dead.

The differing accounts we read in the Gospels
Could raise the question of authenticity.

And I guess maybe, for some, it does.

But the proof of the Resurrection
Doesn't rest on the evidence of an empty tomb.

It rests on the later experiences of individuals
Who experience first hand
An encounter with the Risen Lord.

They were convinced to such a magnitude
That all of them met death
Rather than deny the fact
That Jesus rose from the dead.

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Have you ever wished for a loved one who dies
To come back from the grave

Just for the reassurance
That what we hope for is really true?
That there is life beyond death?

I have heard testimonies from folks
Who seem to feel the presence of a dead loved-one.

Some shrugged their shoulders
And pass it off as just their imagination.

Sometimes the feeling is quite strong
And leaves them pondering
If indeed what they felt was real.

That indeed their loved one has returned from the grave
And is trying the best they can

To assure them they are alive and well
Though somewhere beyond
Our present world and senses.

Whether or not these appearances
Offer any hope for us or not
We cannot prove or disprove these experiences.

Because we encounter these experiences individually
And not corporately.

But that first Easter morning
Is a collection of more than one person's account.

The accounts are testimonies
From many who encountered the Risen Christ.

Some who believed from the very beginning
And some who had been skeptics.

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When Mel Gibson had finished
The production of his film
The Passion of the Christ back in 2004

He invited many church and religious leaders
To preview the movie
Before it came out to the general public.

After the movie preview
Many of the religious leaders protested.

They didn't like the ending of the movie.

And so, Mel went back and included a small scene
To satisfy this small group
That included many Protestant church leaders.

The original movie, Gibson had produced
Ended with the scene of the dead Christ
Being taken down from the cross.

That's it!

The movie ended with the death of Jesus.

The cry of protest coming out of the preview was this.

“How can you end the story of Jesus Christ
Without offering any sign of hope?”

“Is the climatic ending of Jesus of Nazareth
Found in his death?”

In an earlier writing, D. L. Moody declares.

It is the Resurrection that is the keystone of the arch on which our faith is supported. If Christ has not risen we must impeach all those witnesses for lying.

If Christ has not risen we have no proof that His crucifixion differed from that of the two thieves. If Christ has not risen, it is impossible to believe the atoning death was acknowledged by God.

William Neil states.

If the first Christians had not believed that Christ rose from the dead there would be no church and no New Testament. If Jesus did not rise from the dead wherein does our hope reside?

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If Jesus' death is the key
That unlocks the door to eternity

Then what happened on that first Easter morning
Is the door itself.

The Resurrection is the monumental moment
When God breaks into our reality
Interrupts the laws of nature

And brings back to life something which had been dead.

And no amount of comparison can do justice
To the wildly, phenomenally, irrational, unscientific, notion
That God brought Jesus back from the dead.

We use symbolic representations of the resurrection
With ideas generated around the return of spring
From the death of winter

From vegetation becoming alive from dead seeds.

We see birth all around us
And seek to understand the truth in the resurrection
From a scientific, natural angle
And come up short

Specifically, because there is no natural comparison
To the unnatural notion of resurrection.

The power of the resurrection
Is the foundational proof
That Jesus is who he claimed to be.

It is what finally convinced his followers
That Jesus was more than a prophet
More than a faith-healer
More than a non-violent insurrectionist.

Jesus is the Son of God.

Resurrection is the proof that Jesus walked
On the other side of the darkness

Has gone on beyond the precipice of death
And has come back to prove it to us.

The Easter story is a story that states as a matter of fact

“Jesus is alive!”

It is the power of his resurrection
That defies death, that defeats the Devil
That is the light on the other side of darkness.

It is what gives courage in the face of fear,
Hope in the face of despair

It is the Resurrection that gives us comfort and strength
In the face of death.

Jesus said

I am the Resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

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The final resting place for Christians is not a grave.

Just as the final resting place of Jesus was not the tomb.

Our final resting place is in the presence of our loving Savior
The Risen Lord, Jesus Christ

The One who has gone to the other side of darkness
Will lead us home to the place prepared for us.

Jesus said.

Do not let your hearts be troubled trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

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This is the promise, the power. This is the Resurrection.