

## **Easter 2007**

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On this Easter Sunday 2007, our hearts and imaginations turn back to that first Easter described in Luke's gospel. If those events occurred today, they would be reported on the 6:00 news. I think it would go something like this:

First, there is a background story from the news desk. *Today there is controversy over a popular Galilean named Jesus who was executed on Friday along with two bandits. This followed his suspicious claims of a new kingdom ruled by God instead of Caesar. Jesus is reported to have associated with all sorts of people, and he ignored local taboos around class, gender and religious purity. He spoke about the love of God as if he was an authority on the subject. Many people claimed to have been healed by him. Jesus died by crucifixion on Golgotha and was buried in a nearby tomb.*

Now, at this point, the camera turns to a Roman centurion who announces, *I was there at the execution and I said it then and I'll say it now, certainly this man was innocent.*

The camera shifts back to the news anchor who adds: *The latest news is that after three days, the body of Jesus is no longer in the tomb. Witnesses say that when they arrived at dawn, the large stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. We now go live to the scene.*

Here we see the actual scene of the Resurrection. The whole area is marked off with yellow tape. The tomb is a small cave that has been dug into the side of a hill with other graves. But this grave is wide open and a huge rock is tilted over to one side. Bags of spices lie scattered in the grass as if they were dropped in a hurry. A crowd mills around and asks questions while law enforcement agents conduct an investigation. One person tests the stone for finger prints and another takes pictures. Still others hold back the curious crowd. The officer in charge is interviewed and reports that the investigation is progressing but so far there is no evidence of foul play.

Time passes, and finally the police run out of things to do. Somebody brings in coffee. By now, the cameras have filmed the tomb from every possible angle. When all is said and done, it is just a big empty hole. The TV reporter interviews several people, and they all say pretty much the same thing, "There's nobody in that tomb."

The reporters get restless, and the camera man wants a cigarette. The women who were the first witnesses try to explain a prediction that Jesus had made, but one of the men cuts them off and says they are telling an idle tale. Just as the news crew begs the station for a commercial break, a stranger walks by and calls out, *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* The disciples have left and the crowd begins to drift away because

there is nothing left to see. There are no signs of Jesus or his body. The only thing that is dead is this news story. That's because there is not enough action at the empty tomb.

It turns out that the cameras and reporters have been sent to the wrong site. Sure, the empty tomb broke the headlines, but the story is not here. The big news is about the Risen Lord and he is long gone from this cemetery. The real action took place hours ago and no one saw it. Now it is the resurrected Jesus who has all the action. The Gospel of Luke has only six sentences about the empty tomb. But the remainder of the gospel and its entire second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, is devoted to the subject of the Risen Lord. We have just read the beginning of the resurrection account this morning. In the next paragraph, two of Jesus' friends are walking home to Emmaus in deep mourning over his death. Jesus joins them as a stranger, walks down the road with them and teaches them the scriptures. Finally, when he shares a meal with them they recognize Jesus.

And soon after that, a large group of Jesus' friends lock themselves in a room because they are afraid they will be murdered next. Christ appears in their midst, reassures them, and talks to them about their future.

You see, the action in the Easter story is with the Risen Lord and it occurs all over the place. He is on the road, he is behind locked doors, he keeps popping up unexpectedly. The Risen Lord is unpredictable. He does seem to show up right in the thick of things following his resurrection: like the time he appeared when the apostles were at work, fishing. Or the morning Jesus arrived at breakfast, right in the middle of everyone's daily routine.

I wish I could tell you that those who saw Jesus after the resurrection lived happily ever after, but it would be a lie. The men and women who experienced the Risen Lord were given tremendous responsibility for building a new community, what we call the Church. They would know success and they would also know great suffering. They were used to being followers of Jesus and suddenly they all had to become leaders. Peter, who denied that he even knew Jesus during the crucifixion, became the head of the Church. And that same Peter, who probably stuck his foot in his mouth more than any other figure in the Bible, became a great preacher.

The women who followed Jesus also became leaders in a culture that gave them the same legal status as cattle. In time, the women of Rome would spread the Gospel throughout that great capitol of the empire. After the resurrection, everyone's life was changed. All the action was with the Risen Lord and he spread it among his people.

And don't forget, the action in the Easter story is also with God. The resurrection of Jesus reveals God to us as an astonishing Creator who insists upon life. The horror of Good Friday is trumped by the resurrection of Jesus. And when we are overwhelmed by fear and death, God resurrects what has been broken and defeated in us. Our Creator offers us life, in new and unexpected ways, in this world, and in the next.

Today on this Easter morning we are following the action and our subject is resurrection and the Risen Lord, not an empty tomb. It is tempting to hover around the empty tomb, like a frustrated news crew. Heaven knows that we could control Jesus better if he had stayed in that tomb. We can spend our lives staring into that empty space, waiting for new information to emerge. It's easy to settle in at the tomb and lean against that big stone. For a while we can ignore our spiritual hunger and our craving for the living Christ. We can pull the weeds and tend the empty tomb of stale beliefs and old grievances. We can put up a plaque to the way things used to be, and commemorate the things that are broken and can never be fixed.

But that story does not have enough action for me, and I know it is not enough action for you. The real story is that the Risen Lord comes to us where we live and move and have our being. We encounter the Risen Lord as we move through the routines of ordinary lives. We can encounter Christ through another person who shares God's truth with us and offers us Christ-like hospitality. We meet Christ where we work, however grinding our work may be (like hauling in heavy fishing nets.) We meet the Risen Lord when we hide behind the locked doors of our fears and prejudices. Jesus especially likes to visit us there and guide us into openness and compassion.

We know the Risen Lord when we claim our common bond with all of God's creation and understand in our very bones that we are linked to all of humanity, even those we will never know. William Sloane Coffin once wrote: *Easter represents a demand as well as a promise, a demand not that we sympathize with the crucified Christ, but that we pledge our loyalty to the risen one. That means an end to all loyalties, to all people and all institutions that crucify.*

When you and I follow the Risen Lord, we become advocates of resurrection for all God's children, in all times and all places.

On this Easter Day, we gather to celebrate the news that Christ is risen and is on the move. So get out on the road of your own life and your community. Keep your mind and heart open and be on the alert for the presence of the Risen Lord. He will always surprise you. He is quite capable of transforming you. When you encounter the Risen Lord in your life, you will know that this is no idle tale.

The news of Easter is about Jesus Christ and it is also about all of us. The witness to the resurrection will not come from a TV news crew. The witness to the resurrection comes from you and me as we walk through the doors of this church today, back to God's own creation in Copley Square. And as we go, may our lives and all our labors proclaim the ancient words of the Church:

*Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*