

“Easter Interruptions”  
April 17, 2022

Luke 24:1-12

Each of the four Gospels tells a somewhat different story, but all acknowledge that women come to the tomb first.

As Luke tells it, on a Sunday morning Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women come to tomb. On the previous Friday they saw how the body of the crucified Jesus was placed in this rock-hewn tomb. They prepared spices and ointments for the usual care of a dead body.

On the Sabbath they rested, as faithful daughters of the Covenant.

Then, at early dawn on the first day of the week, they continue with their work. They get on with the task that needs to be done as this difficult day begins. They show up—and are ready to do what is expected.

Then comes the first interruption of Easter:

The stone that had sealed the entrance is rolled away.

Going inside the tomb that they might care for a corpse, they do not find the body.

Seeking to be faithful, they could not find the object of their faithfulness.

This is what Easter does. It comes to us as we live our lives and interrupts the tasks we have set out for ourselves. It interrupts the work that the situation seems to require of us. It asks us to reconsider our priorities and leaves us wondering if we might be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As the women take in this situation, as they try to make sense of this startling reality, two men in dazzling clothes show up. Luke doesn't come right out and say it, but in describing what seems to be the first occasion of people all dressed up for Easter, he is suggesting that these two are angels—a word, you know, that simply means “messenger.”

You also know—because I've said it often enough—that when angels appear in the Bible, the first thing they usually say is “Do not be afraid.”

But not this time—not as Luke tells the Easter story.

The women are terrified. And instead of words of reassurance, they are challenged by a question: “Why search among the dead for one who is alive?”

Their motives, their very presence at the tomb, are questioned. If they are looking for Jesus, they are in the wrong place, for one does not seek the living among the dead.

Easter begins, not with the resurrected Christ, but with a message: “He is not here, but has risen.”

To take those two messengers seriously when they say: “He is not here, but has risen,” requires some effort on our part—or it requires the grace of God that makes faith possible.

Now, your faith might be shaky. You may have no faith at all.

That's OK right now.

Because all of us—those of great faith, those of little faith, those of no faith—all of us can listen.

We can listen to the message that the Christ “has risen.”

If we seek Christ in the realm of the dead the question meets us again and again: “Why? Why do you search among the dead for one who is alive?”

Easter interrupts what we are doing, how we are living, and invites us out of the predictable, dying world of anger, resentment, and bitterness.

Easter calls us toward possibility and wonder, knowing that Christ is going on before us.

Remember—the messengers tell them. Remember how Jesus told you that he would be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.

And this brings us to the second interruption of Easter:

Remembering, the women go and interrupt the eleven and all the rest. The women are witnesses to the resurrection. They are *apostles* equal to the men in their experience and their calling.

Luke doesn't tell us, but other Gospels indicate that most of the followers of Jesus were hiding out in those days after the crucifixion. Out of fear they were behind locked doors.

Now their security is breeched.

Their certainty is broken.

The women tell others what they were told and what they remembered.

Good news is often met with disbelief. That's why being a Christian can seem so foolish. Who is going to believe what we have to say?

"He is not here but has risen." How much easier just to say spring has come again.

"In Jesus Christ we are forgiven." How much easier to say you're such a good person that you don't need to be forgiven.

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God." How much easier to say there is a god within you. *That's* something people will listen to, but it's not the good news that we have.

An idle tale many will say. But this news of resurrection is the only story we have to tell to others.

Hearing the witness of the women, Peter gets up and runs to the tomb. In Bach's *Easter Oratorio* Peter sings “Come, haste and run you fleet feet, reach the cave which harbors Jesus. Laughter and merriment attend our hearts, for our Salvation is risen.” Luke tells us Peter then comes home amazed.

In the struggle of life and death, God has had the last laugh.

This is the promise of Easter. Not certainty about what has happened. But certainly amazement. Certainly, laughter and merriment.

And this, then, is the third interruption of Easter.

Easter interrupts our certitude and leaves us perplexed.

That's how Luke describes the women when they first discover that the body of Jesus is missing from the tomb. They are at a loss about this. They are "perplexed," Luke says.

That is the effect that Jesus often had on his followers.

And he still does, doesn't he? It is usually difficult to get a grip on what he is saying, what he is doing.

Uncertain. Puzzled. Trying to think through something that, really, can't be thought through.

And Peter is described as "amazed"—again a word suggesting more awe than understanding. It's the same word that Luke uses at the beginning of this Gospel to describe all those who heard the shepherds tell of angels who announced the birth of a savior. They, too, were amazed.

From birth to resurrection, the story of Jesus is filled with amazement and perplexity.

We remember those word of Isaiah about the servant of God:

He shall startle many nations;  
kings will shut their mouths because of him;  
for that which had not been told them they shall see,  
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

This sense of wonder is a marvelous gift.

Easter interrupts us and tells us to look again. Our routines and are expectations are interrupted. We end up amazed at what we have heard. We're left stammering only a few short words—Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed.

Easter interrupts us. Because it does, we are able to hear the invitation to embrace life with all its possibilities and challenges. Live a fully human life; let the image of God in which you were created, in which we were all created, shine through you.

Christ is risen. And we are all made alive in Christ.