

The Lessons Appointed for Use on

Easter Day

Principal Service

Year C

RCL



Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

John 20:1-18

The Collect

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;

for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it

an infant that lives but a few days,

or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;

for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a
youth,

and one who falls short of a hundred will be consid-
ered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;

they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their
hands.

They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD--
and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 Page 760, BCP

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let Israel now proclaim,
“His mercy endures for ever.”
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.
- 15 There is a sound of exultation and victory
in the tents of the righteous:
- 16 “The right hand of the LORD has triumphed!
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!
the right hand of the LORD has triumphed!”
- 17 I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD.
- 18 The LORD has punished me sorely,
but he did not hand me over to death.
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter them;
I will offer thanks to the LORD.
- 20 “This is the gate of the LORD;
he who is righteous may enter.”
- 21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The same stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the LORD'S doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 On this day the LORD has acted;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Je-

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

SERMON

The Resurrection. The big, honking roadblock to an rational faith. The great big illuminated “Bridge is out” sign on the way to a rational understanding of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, called “The Christ”. You cannot get past it, church. I saw a piece once on National Geographic in which the presenter was explaining the plagues of Egypt by reference to a volcanic eruption. You can do that if it amuses you, but the same techniques won't get you past the Resurrection. The scientists working on the Large Hadron Collider hope to recreate the conditions of the universe a billionth of a second after the Big Bang. That will keep them employed and out of saloons for a very long time, but no Hadron Collider, large or small, will get you past the Resurrection.

I'm a Disciple and Disciples are rational people. For

years you've heard me preach my understanding of a rational faith. You've heard me tell you that God doesn't do magic tricks. Every year, though, we come up against the Resurrection, and I get schooled. The Resurrection is not a rational event, because there is no rational explanation of it that fits the facts, and it's not a historical event because the Resurrection itself was not witnessed by anyone. The best we can do is relate to the people who were there, and hear their story. Today, the Fourth Evangelist brings us three such people. Those today who choose not to embrace our faith explain away the testimony of these three people by saying they were wrong, or made it up, or were, themselves, creatures of fiction. That is, I suppose, the path of least resistance. It takes less effort to just refuse to engage the questions raised by the accounts of these three people as they encounter the empty tomb. That's as may be. I

have never preached to you that you should find the easy way out. I've always urged you to confront the accounts that appear in the Gospels. This account includes a grave, and unless you confront that grave, as the three people in our text do, none of this will make any sense.

I know many Christians who refuse to confront the grave. They're all Easter Sunday, no Lamentation Friday. As we look at the text today, I want you to notice how important it is to the people who were there to confront the grave first.

We start with Mary's account. All the Disciples were still hiding under the sofa when Mary, early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, came creeping into a graveyard, no doubt scared half out of her wits, but still determined to be near where He was laid. Mary comes from grief, from shock, from denial of the awful thing she has witnessed. She hasn't slept

all night. She has paced. She has wept. Mary is someone we can relate to, every one of us who have suffered the death of a loved one and gone through the house shouting, “Why? Why?” Mary is confronting the awful unfairness of death, as do each of us as we sit helpless beside a deathbed, a casket, an urn and demand that God hold Himself accountable for the terrible thing that has happened. “Why, God? Why Him? He did nothing wrong! Why Him? Explain yourself, God!” Mary comes, early in the morning, while it is still dark, seeking only the comfort that comes from being near the one she loved so, her Lord, her Teacher, her Master.

When we are crushed by grief at the loss of a loved one, and come with flowers to visit the grave of one taken too soon from us, there is no answer from God that can satisfy us. Our friends, meaning well but only rubbing the raw place afresh, will often say something

foolish like God needed an angel, but this time....this time was even more awful. Mary was faced with an open grave.

How in the world am I going to get across the horror she must have felt? The Romans have killed Him and now this? They can't even let Him be in His grave? Part of the horror of crucifixion, to Jews, was that the body was left on the cross after death to be food for the scavenging animals. To Jews, and to us as well, to be deprived of a proper burial was doubly horrible. Joseph of Arimathea had intervened with Pilate to save Jesus from this final indignity. Has even that small hope been dashed? Have the Romans taken His body and thrown it to the dogs?

Mary has no hope of Resurrection. She is overcome by horror and loss too great to bear alone. None of us can do so alone. We need the strength of others, and she

ran to the two who had been so close to her Lord: Simon, called Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, often identified as John, though the text never names him.

It's not clear in our English translation, but the Greek seems to indicate that Peter and the other disciple were not at the same house. We can imagine Mary running, first to one house, then to the other hammering on the doors with her terrible news. "Come! Come quickly! They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

And now we meet the other two people who were there, Simon, who Jesus named the Rock, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. If we can slow down a minute and think about this, we're faced with a very good question: why are they running? If Mary's words are just loose talk from a hysterical woman, the product of her grief,

why do they run? They will only find the tomb sealed, as it was left. If her tale is true, and the Romans have removed His body, why do they run? There is nothing that can be done. Rome has the power to do that, and worse. What could the disciples do?

What would you do? Dawn is just breaking. The chill of the night and the dew only makes the terror of the last three days more horrible. Mary's half out of her wits with fear and anger. What would you do? You are helpless before the power of Rome. They can do whatever they want with the body of your friend, and they can do whatever they want with your body as well. Peter, out of sheer terror, has three times denied knowing Jesus. What would you do?

Peter ran. He ran so fast that he passed the other disciple who had stopped at the door, and ran right into the open grave. What did he think he was going to see? The

ravaged body of his Lord, food for dogs? An empty tomb? Certainly not what he saw.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

What is so interesting about that? Peter and the other disciple came running to confront the incredible story of a hysterical witness. What is significant about what he saw?

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Two distraught, exhausted men, just as dawn is breaking, have entered a tomb to confront...what? And they have seen, “the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with

the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.” As a result, the other disciple “saw and believed.” Believed what??

To understand that, one must know something about Jewish burial custom. In Jewish custom, the face of a dead man, particularly one who had been disfigured, was to be covered, just as we do today. The first thing we do at a fatal automobile accident is to cover the face of the victim. Thus, “the cloth that had been on Jesus' head.” This cloth would have covered Jesus' face as he was removed from the cross. Such a cloth still exists today. It is in Spain and is known as The Sudarium of Oviedo. It is venerated as this very cloth.

There is another cloth connected with this account – the Shroud of Turin. Whether it is or it isn't the shroud that Peter and the other disciple found, the image on the cloth shows a man with his hands crossed over his mid-

dle, and his feet together. If you lie down and try to maintain that position without strain, you'll find that your hands fall to your side and your feet separate. Clearly, the man in the image of the Shroud of Turin had been bound in that position, probably with a strip of cloth now sewn to the length of the Shroud. This is exactly the situation of Lazarus, who was raised by Jesus. As Lazarus exited the tomb,

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

What Peter and the other disciple saw in that tomb was the shroud lying there with the cloth or sudarium which covered Jesus' face rolled up in a place by itself. Grave robbers, Roman or otherwise, would not have scrupulously removed the binding and the grave clothes to remove a naked man. Grave robbers would have

packed body, shroud, sudarium and all off. Dogs would have dragged the body about and scattered the grave clothes. Even if, as was speculated by the Romans, the disciples themselves had removed the body, why would they have taken out a naked man, and then rebound the empty grave clothes?

That the grave clothes and the bindings were as they were showed both disciples that the body had not been stolen or scavenged, but that something...else...had happened. What, they did not know, “for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”

So, here we are back at the big honking roadblock to an understandable faith. The body of our Lord has somehow evaporated from WITHIN the grave clothes. We're up against it. We have confronted the grave, and we are stopped. There is no humanly understandable

way to move from Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday. Only faith will carry you. The Hubble Space Telescope is a miraculous instrument, but it cannot peer into the Resurrection. The Large Hadron Collider is the most complicated machine ever built, but it cannot provide any answers to the rational mind seeking to understand the Resurrection. We are left with two pieces of cloth, the Shroud and the Sudarium, two men who saw, one woman's account.

John gives us a second story in our text for today – he tells us of Mary's experience with the Risen Lord after Peter and the other disciple have left.

Mary's excitement at seeing the Risen Lord is the emotion we all share on Easter. It is the result of the thing we cannot understand. It is the road on the other side of the roadblock. The Resurrection is easy to think about. It lifts our spirits. Lamentation Friday convicts

us, because the people of the time, for what they saw as good reason, did the worst to Jesus that they could do. The suffering of Jesus at the hands of His people convicts each of us of our brokenness, our failure to live up to what we have been redeemed to be. Nobody likes to think about that.

But we must. Just as Mary did, we must first confront the grave before we can experience the Resurrection. We have to see the results of our brokenness on the very flesh of Jesus before we can experience the forgiveness of the Resurrection.

For what seemed like good reason to the people involved, Jesus was flogged, and the flesh torn from his bones. That is our sinfulness speaking. For what seemed like good reason to the people involved, Jesus had a crown of thorns jammed into his scalp. That is our sinfulness speaking. For what seemed like good rea-

son to the people involved, Jesus was nailed to a tree, and humiliated and spat on while he died, and was laid in a tomb and the book closed on this Jesus of Nazareth, called “The Christ”. That is our sinfulness speaking, and it was all of that that Mary, the disciple Jesus loved and Peter confronted at the grave. Only after embracing all of that, could Mary see the Risen Christ.

Those who would be Easter-only Christians, who would celebrate forgiveness without acknowledging their own guilt have deceived themselves. Only by confronting the grave, the death, the horror of the crucifixion, only by sharing the elements of Communion, “my body which is broken for you, the cup of a new covenant in my blood” can we celebrate the Resurrection, for to deny our own complicity is to reduce Christ’s sacrifice to mere theater.

Each drop of blood spilled by Jesus fell to earth as

an indictment of our stubborn insistence that violence can be overcome by violence and evil can be expunged from our midst by evil. Each groan ripped from the throat of Jesus teaches us of our complicity in the assumptions that lead to this abomination and if that were the only sermon spoken, then we would truly be damned.

But it isn't. The Resurrection, that great roadblock to human understanding, cries out in defiance of our human pride, "Go! He is Risen. Live the life of the Kingdom now, where you are. Hold yourself as nothing. Live in love, for you were born to this! Pray with St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

AMEN

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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