

Easter Morning 2016—Year C
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
March 27, 2016

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!
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How do we prepare for Easter?

Is it the buying of dresses and bonnets? Cleaning the suits and making brunch reservations?
Well, yes.

Is it the painstaking preparation of Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday, to Good Friday and the Vigil last night? Is it reverent and intimate worship? Is it walking with Jesus with deliberation and prayerful attentiveness? Well, yes.

Is arranging the flowers, attending to the festive coffee hour and hiding the eggs for the children? Is it that strangely pagan rabbit that pops up everywhere? Also, yes. And, don't forget to call your parents.

There is a shadow side to all these Easter preparations about which you may not be aware. While all these lush and moving services are being planned, while altar clothes and Easter dresses are being starched, all the priests and pastors in the country are talking to each other on Facebook.

This is God's honest truth. You'd think we would take a break from social media, but it seems to be the opposite. Don't ask me why. It's one of the great mysteries of our faith.

Last week, I was online, avoiding writing a sermon, chatting with a priest in Madison, who was also online, avoiding writing a sermon. We got into a conversation about the craft of writing a sermon. Which is taking procrastination to a whole new level, as far as I can tell.

She said to me that it can be a challenge to write a sermon that is "intellectually credible." And, with great respect to her and her ministry, this strikes me as wrong.

There is nothing intellectually credible about the Empty Tomb on Easter morning. The women—Mary, Joanna, Mary Magdalene—did not think their way into the empty tomb. They walked in and dropped to their knees when the men in dazzling white appeared. They knew in their BODIES, in their CELLS that something profound happened—that the empty tomb meant something impossible to think through.

By the way, I have nothing against thinking, or against intellectual credulity. I'm a big fan. I don't want an engineer having a profound, religious experience in lieu of calculating how much weight a bridge I'm driving over can hold. I want her to do math and lots of it. (I don't want my

doctor dropping to his knees in ecstatic convulsions during a diagnosis. I want an MRI, thank you very much.)

But, the empty tomb doesn't work like that. The empty tomb is yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever. The empty tomb is a fire in the darkness, is hope as an antidote to despair. The empty tomb is the radical belief that the bombings in Brussels and Nigeria do not determine the course of our time here on this earth. The empty tomb screams a blessing into the darkness, and we cannot help but be transformed and fall to our knees like Mary and Mary and Joanna.

This is your free gift. Unearned and directly from God. That you, the ordinary Christian in an ordinary town during the ordinary month of March are blessed beyond all measure by a God who has the power to transform darkness to light, death into life.

When the women come to the tomb, to prepare the body of their friend Jesus, they expected to find a corpse. Instead they find two men in dazzling clothes asking, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

And I think the question is germane to our lives today. I think we have a tendency to linger our minds on the things of the world that are dead--being weighed down with stuff and insane expectations and toxic beliefs about happiness and fulfilment. All of that nonsense is just death in better packaging. And we should not spend our time or talents or treasures on death.

Our God is interested in tombs that are empty, in places of resurrection, of life, of healing. That is what all of this Easter preparation is about. That is why we make flower garlands, decorate the baptismal font, bring out the best music and our best clothes. It's not because we are in some kind of Easter rut--it's because we cannot help but respond to the God of unending life with the very best that we have to offer. The bright colors of our clothes are a reaction to God making everything new. To God breaking chains, freeing slaves, healing broken souls, mending broken relationships.

And when the women went to report to the other disciples that Jesus was raised, the men, except Peter, didn't believe them. "It seemed to them an idle tale." (I'm sure no women here can related to being talked down to by a man at work, by the way) That's what happens when we preach the Resurrection. The powers of the world often tell us that we're wrong. That death is inevitable. War is necessary. Kids in Milwaukee being shot every week is just the way things have to be. Even the disciples, except Peter, told the women that there is no such thing as Resurrection.

I refuse to let the powers of the world that worship death decide for me what is and is not true. Instead, I believe, along with the women, that God has done something magnificent this Easter morning, bringing life where there was only death.

That truth is what we're celebrating this morning. Life out of death. Light out of darkness.

Peter, that wonderful, complicated disciple, went home amazed. And I hope that's our response today as well. Amazed that we worship a God who is always on the side of life. Amazed that our

world is transformed by divine love. Amazed that no tomb can hold the transformative potential of God.

So yes. Please, Go to brunch. Call your mother or father. Hunt for eggs and do whatever else it means to you to celebrate. Because our story is not an idle tale. The women have preached to us the good news that God is alive, the Tomb is Empty, death is dead and the world will never be the same. And if that is not a reason to celebrate on Easter Day, I do not know what is. Amen.