

Easter Homily 2007

Last week, a young dad in our parish told me of a conversation he had with his eight year old son.

The conversation was about the Resurrection and Ken was explaining to Alex how we believe that after Jesus suffered and died, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with his Father.

Alex thought this over for a moment, looked at his dad and said, "And you know this - HOW?"

Alex's question is a good one!

We are all here on Easter

to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead and we might well turn to each other and ask, "And you know this - HOW?"

How do YOU know that Christ rose from the dead?

The simplest answer, of course, is: "Someone told me..."

Who told *you* that Jesus rose from the dead?

Chances are, it was your parents, just as Alex's dad told him.

And chances are that your parents first heard it from your grandparents.

If we trace the line of people who told others about the Resurrection then we would eventually make our way back to the tomb of Jesus where "two men in dazzling garments" told Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, "He has been raised, he is not here:

why do you seek the living one among the dead?"

And the three women returned to the apostles and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And do you know what? It almost ended there!

The apostles didn't believe the women - they said their story was nonsense.

But Peter ran to the tomb and he became a believer and then he came back and told others, who told others, who told others... until finally someone told you and someone told me, and just recently, Ken told Alex....

And oh, there's so much more here than just a report about an empty tomb!

Tombs can be empty for many reasons and the only thing an empty tomb proves is that a body is no longer there.

Beyond the empty tomb, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, and Peter, and the apostles-including-doubting-Thomas, and two disciples on the road to Emmaus,

and once to a crowd of over 500.

Far more important than the empty tomb (an experience of emptiness)
was the *fullness* of Christ's presence
experienced by those to whom he appeared.

And having MET the Risen Jesus,
they told others, who told others... who told you and me.

In our own times and in our culture
we aren't easily given to taking things as truth
- just on the word of others.

We are skeptics. We want proof. We demand documentation.

We want to see for ourselves.

Yes. *We want to see for ourselves...*

And *that's* what Easter is all about.

Easter is a time for us to ask NOT

"Who told us that Jesus rose from the dead?"

but rather a time to ask,

"Have WE seen the Risen Christ? Has he appeared to US?"

We need to see for ourselves!

If our faith is based on an empty tomb,

it is based on a void, an emptiness, a negative.

What we need are eyes, ears, minds, hands, arms and hearts OPEN

to the Jesus who appeared to his friends, as we read in the scriptures.

There is no one to whom the Risen Christ will not make himself known,
although sometimes we are so focused on the void,

on the negative, on the emptiness,

that we fail to see him right before us, right beside us, right behind us.

In the scriptures Jesus appeared to the brave women
who approached the Roman guards to visit the tomb
so that they might anoint Christ's body:

in other words,

Jesus appeared to these women who expected to find his corpse,

- not to meet him alive.

They came in grief over their loss, not in faith in the resurrection.

And Jesus appeared to his friends who were cowardly huddled in fear
behind locked doors having denied and abandoned him, only hours before...

And Jesus appeared to those two on the road to Emmaus
who were so busy about their own disappointment and concerns
that they did not recognize him as he joined them
and their conversation.

And he waits to meet each of us, too,
for he does not ask us to rely emptiness for evidence,
nor just on the hearsay of others,

but rather the Risen Christ comes to us in our grief
as he came to Mary Magdalene;
he comes to us in our fears, anxieties and doubts
as he came to the apostles;
and he comes to us in our confusion
as he came as wisdom to the travelers along the road to Emmaus.

But we might have to roll away some stones
that block us from meeting him,
even as the stone sealing his tomb was rolled away.
If my heart is like stone
the Risen Jesus will want to touch and heal it.
If my anger blinds me and keeps me from his body, the Church,
he will want to help me see with eyes of renewed faith
that the Church is his body.

If my selfishness turns me inward,
he will want to pierce that by opening my heart to others.

If I've decided there's nothing new under the sun,
he may need to rock my world
in ways I do not expect or imagine - or want!

That we can reassure one another in faith
by telling our children and each other that Jesus is risen
is a great thing.

That we continue to hear his voice in the scriptures
is a gift from God.

That we can meet the Risen Christ, especially in serving the poor,
is an opportunity we do not often enough afford ourselves.

That we gather here at Easter and on every Sunday
to celebrate the life and presence of the Risen Christ among us
is a great blessing.

Just as the Risen Jesus quietly slipped into the lives
of the earliest believers, so he slips in our lives today.

Jesus rose in quiet and silence,
he rose from the dead in the dead of night,
to live among us, day by day.

Where will his path cross ours today? this week?
in the months, in the year ahead of us?

Will we know him when we meet him? Will we be looking for him?
Will we welcome him when he comes?

That we might recognize him in our daily lives,
he comes always to our table here
appearing to us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

**Meet him here, this morning,
that you might be readied to meet him
whenever and wherever he chooses to come to meet you.**

Rev. Austin Fleming