

“A Basket Full of Blessings”

I was looking for a painting or image to put on today’s bulletin, something joyful and suitably uplifting and Christian—not bunnies or chicks. Of course, most of the images I found were not at all happy. Silly me, as the Gospels tell us, that first Easter morning was anything but jubilant. The disciples both men and women, did not know what was happening or what to do. The men were in hiding in fear of being arrested and crucified like Jesus. The woman who could operate below the radar, so to speak, did the things that they could do. They prayed, they cooked, and they intended to care for body of Jesus.

It was the women who discovered the empty tomb when they went to anoint Jesus’ body. They wondered what had happened. Perhaps Jesus’s enemies had stolen his body, or the Romans had moved it to an unmarked grave. Having endured the sadness and confusion around Jesus’ crucifixion, the men and women who followed Jesus, were stunned that his tomb was empty. Their encounter with angels added to their bewilderment. Angels might bring glad tidings, but encounters with heavenly messengers are always unsettling.

The angels told the women strange news about Jesus being raised from the dead. Being raised from the dead was not possible. When people die they stay dead. That is the way of life. The disciples found the women’s news preposterous. They ignored it as an “idle tale,” all except Peter. He had to check for himself. When he saw the empty tomb he did not know what to make of it. Luke simply describes Peter as “amazed.” It is not until they encounter Jesus in the flesh that they start to realize the significance of what has happened.

The story is so implausible that Saul of Tarsus, among others, will persecute Jesus’ followers for years to come. It is only through Saul’s experience on the Damascus road that he converts from persecutor to the greatest evangelist of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the process his name is changed to Paul.

We have an advantage over those first followers of Jesus. We know that the Jesus movement survives and thrives despite persecutions, corrupt leaders, wars against other faiths as well as wars between Christians. We know that the history of our faith has been far from perfect. But at the core there have always been people of true faith who accepted Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. They looked to his teachings not just as aphorisms for life, but as a way of life. Jesus was for them, as I hope he is for us, a real companion in life. Jesus was their way, their truth and their life;¹ just as he can be for us if we allow him.

There is confusion and doubt in our world, just as there was for the first followers. There have been “wars and rumors of wars... [there is] nation [rising]

¹ John 14:6

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against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and ... famines and earthquakes,"² throughout human history. But unlike those early followers of Jesus for whom the events of that first Easter Day created confusion and anxiety, we know what happened. Jesus, through God's great mercy, broke the bounds of death. Jesus opened the door for us to abundant life in this world and the next.

Therefore, do not be shy or embarrassed about rejoicing in this the greatest gift of all. Do not hide your joy behind Easter bunnies, chocolate eggs, and other trappings of the secularized Easter. Jesus' resurrection changed everything. Shout for joy "He is risen!"

We are blessed and we can also be a blessing by spreading our blessings around.

"Alleluia, Christ the Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia."

² Matthew 24:6 NRSV with edits by the author