

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

Last Monday at our weekly chapel, I asked the Day School children what Easter is all about. Not surprisingly, I guess, their answer was bunnies and eggs. Curious about why we hunt eggs on Easter, I researched it on the internet and found these “fun facts” that allegedly help clarify this ancient practice:

1. Jesus favorite food was scrambled eggs. We hunt them because Jesus is hungry. In my opinion this first “fact” overlooks the reality that few people hunt real eggs anymore. Mostly they’re plastic with candy inside.
2. Eggs are high in protein and you need lots of protein after being buried in a tomb for three days.
3. Jesus’ tomb was actually egg shaped.
4. Egging someone’s house is an ancient sign of blessing.
5. The earliest records of the Eucharist within Christian house-churches imply it was celebrated with eggs, toast, and mimosas.
6. Contrary to modern science, the world is actually egg shaped.
7. The egg came before the chicken. Look it up.

These are all nonsense, of course, but surely it can’t hurt to have some fun on a day that’s meant to be filled with joy and gladness!

It doesn’t begin that way, of course. It begins for us after forty days of Lent, a time of prayer and penitence, of consciously remembering our Lord’s suffering. We have plenty of time during Lent and Holy Week to process it in the only way we can, by remembering. For Mary Magdalene and the other women, this was surely a day of despair. What we remember, they lived through, and the memories of all that had happened must have been impossible to clear from their minds. What they were not able to do for their Lord in his life, they wanted to do for him in his death, so they carried with them spices to prepare his body for its final rest. After everything that had happened, they could not have expected to see the stone rolled away from the tomb or to find the body gone.

Mary Magdalene is named in all four Gospels as the first to arrive at Jesus’ tomb on the Day of Resurrection. In Luke’s account, she was accompanied by two other women: Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. These three women were also named together in the 8th chapter of Luke, but not only because they accompanied Jesus and the disciples when Jesus traveled into cities and villages proclaiming the Good News of God’s Kingdom. Luke tells us Jesus had cured them of evil spirits and infirmities. He also tells us the three women provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their own resources. These women were connected to Jesus, and not merely as his followers. Yes, they believed in him and the work he was doing. But they also cared deeply for him. Not just in his life, but also in his death.

Jesus' death on the day of Preparation, the day preceding the Sabbath, was problematic. Scripture tells us that this particular Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. The women had to wait until the Sabbath was over, until the first day of the week, to tend to Jesus' body using the rituals that were prescribed by their tradition. As soon as the temple observance was complete and the Sabbath rest was over, they went to the tomb. There was no body there for them to minister to. We don't have to imagine their reaction; Luke tells us! They are perplexed. When two men suddenly stand next to them, the women are terrified. After Peter sees for himself that Jesus' body is gone, he is amazed.

Perplexed. Terrified. Amazed. We have their reactions, but no concrete evidence about what happened, no way to prove what they saw and what we believe. Lots of people have tried, looking at possible evidence—from the Shroud of Turin to the location of the nails on the cross. There's a lot of evidence that's better than you may think, but it's not conclusive. For some folks that makes this whole business of faith and belief difficult—if not impossible—to deal with. Yet the truth remains for us: Christ died on the cross and on the third day he rose from the dead.

The mighty acts of God are mystical, mysterious, and miraculous. Those are very abstract words. Faith is very often gray. We acknowledge that in our Eucharistic Prayer when the celebrant says, "Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith," and we respond together "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." Alleluia! We cannot explain what we believe, yet we still believe it; and because we believe it, the story doesn't end. Do you remember the question asked by the two men who visited the tomb? "Why look for the living among the dead?" Is it a riddle? No, it has a very simple answer, really. Jesus is not dead. He died, but he rose again. He lives!

But there are questions still, aren't there? Doubts that make us wonder what the miraculous, mysterious resurrection of our Lord more than two thousand years ago could possibly mean for us who are so far removed for it. What difference does it make in this troubled, tumultuous world?

In her book "Not Counting Women and Children," Megan McKenna recalls that while studying a passage from Luke with a large group in a parish mission, someone called out harshly, "Have you ever brought someone back from the dead?" McKenna notes she had been saying that life happens when we are interrupted and that some of the most powerful acts of resurrection happen to the least likely people; that we are the people of resurrection and hope, called to live passionately and compassionately with others, to defy death, to forgive, and to bring others back into the community, to do something that is life-giving, that fights death and needless suffering. The question from the back of the room challenged what she had been saying. "Have *you* ever brought someone back from the dead?"

McKenna's response was "yes," and she went on to say, "Every time I bring hope into a situation, every time I bring joy that shatters despair, every time I forgive others and give them back dignity and the possibility of a future with me and others in the community, every time I listen to others and affirm them and their life, every time I speak the truth in public, every time I confront injustice—yes—I bring people back from the dead."

McKenna is not Jesus. Nor are we. But we believe that Jesus died and rose again so that we and others can live, and not just live, but live with hope and joy and peace. And because we believe, we, too, have been called—that is, given the responsibility—to bring joy, hope and peace, forgiveness, dignity and affirmation to others in a world where far too many people think that Easter is just about eggs and bunnies.

It is not!

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

And let the people say, The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!