

Easter Sunday, 4/12/2020  
Luke 24: 1-12  
An Idle Tale?!  
Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks  
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“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb.” (Luke 24:11-12)

What enables us – allows us – moves us – inspires us – to believe anything ... especially anything we are told? “Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!” ... Most of the time I think our first impulse is to test it, to see it for ourselves, experience it for ourselves. Like Peter running to the tomb, or Thomas saying unless he sees for himself and puts his hands in Jesus’ wounds he will not believe.

I can remember as a very young child going to church on Easter Sunday after hunting for our Easter baskets at home (I found mine strangely inside the piano), and hearing about the women and the empty tomb and that Jesus was not there but had risen. And remembering how we had dyed Easter eggs, planted seeds to sprout, and made butterflies in Sunday School, and wondering, somewhat disbelievingly, whether Jesus had turned into an Easter egg, a flower, or a butterfly. On some level I knew better, but I also began to learn that there are some questions that have no satisfactory, convincing answers, some problems that may have no solution.

My Dad's assistant, Fr. Proud, was at the dinner table one night and he gave my siblings and I a problem to solve. He drew a picture of an X inside a square inside a circle, and challenged us to draw it without tracing over any line. I tried for days to solve this problem, but could not do it. I would ask for the solution and Fr. Proud wouldn't tell me. Finally he showed me that his instructions did not say we couldn't draw any lines outside the circle. And then he drew the X inside the square inside the circle with one line extending out from one corner of the square to the other side so as to not draw over any line. I was outraged. And I pointed out to him that this was not the same picture he had given us and he was cheating. He had the grace to apologize. But for months my school notebooks were full of this picture – all my attempts to solve this problem. I kept throwing myself at impossibility.

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (Luke 24: 5)

Many of us have had to come face to face with death or the prospect of death – of ourselves, of those whom we love, of people known to us. And if we have not yet come face to face with death, we know we will. And these encounters, these brushes with loss and death raise up in us many feelings – of hurt, anger, confusion, intense loss and grief. Questions of why and how, and what could we have done, and what can I do now. We now find ourselves, our world, in this place of physical separation and uncertainty, not knowing what or

whom to believe. When will the pandemic end? How many here and around the world will die? Will I or my family or anyone I know get it? How are we going to make ends meet? And on this Easter – this Resurrection Sunday – we face this impossible, unanswerable question; “Why do we seek the living among the dead?”

There is no answer. There is no solution. There is only response. And our response has something to do with the emptiness of suffering and loss encountering, even crashing into, the emptiness of the tomb. We work hard to fill the emptiness of suffering and loss, fill it with what we think we know, the certainties we have been taught. With the women come to the tomb, we try to fill the emptiness with distractions, treasures, mementoes, memories, with spices and actions that channel and hold our grief and loss and questions. Yet distractions can hold our attention only so long, treasures gather dust, memories fade and are lost, the spices lose their potency, and questions have no satisfactory answers ... Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen.”

With those women, even in the face of absence, we cling to the presence of the One we love, the One in whom we have placed all trust and hope, all belief. Yet if we are attentive, if we pay attention as we keep throwing ourselves at the impossibility, the emptiness of our hearts becomes the emptiness of the tomb. The idle tale becomes truth ... He is risen! Emptiness makes room for

mystery. The mystery of all that is unknown to us, the mystery of all the questions we cannot answer. Yet ... yet we can always respond.

There is a day in Holy Week and Easter that has been neglected if not forgotten in Protestant Christian churches, yet it still is observed in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches. That day is Holy Saturday – the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It is the day when, as the ancient Apostles' Creed puts it, Jesus descended into hell. In the practice of the early Christian churches Holy Saturday is the day the church along with Christ is dead and buried. There are no sacraments available – no communion no baptism, no weddings, or funerals, no prayer no presence ... only absence. The church is a tomb, closed cold and dark. No candles no light. Until ... at the first worship service of Easter, before the sun rises, friends gather, gifts are brought, and in response to the question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?", the emptiness makes room for mystery, a new fire is kindled, and we respond, going forth to proclaim, not with an answer, but with what is new, unfathomable grace given us and the world - "Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!"

Amen.