

BEGGARING BELIEF

Seeing isn't always believing. Many saw Jesus throughout their lives but they could not believe. Mary Magdalene's statement to the disciples – 'I have seen the Lord' – is the essence of today's celebration. This devoted follower immediately became the missioner to the disciples. Little matter that women were deemed unreliable witnesses. In Luke's account, when the women went to tell the men about the empty tomb, they considered it 'an idle tale'. But in John's version, Peter and John ran straight for the tomb on *her* word. They saw for themselves - then they went home to tell their families. For Mary Magdalene was reserved the special grace of seeing the risen Christ - she saw because she believed.

She wasn't the only one. In Matthew's Gospel we read, 'While she was returning, some of the Roman guards went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. The priests gave them money to tell lies saying, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away.' In every gospel account the friends of Jesus are utterly surprised by the resurrection. They cower behind closed doors. But the religious ones troop up to the praetorium for a Saturday morning discussion. No matter that it is the Sabbath and they have spent a lot of time and energy on calling Jesus to account because he dared heal people on the Lord's day.

Perhaps we've always thought that God or angels had to move the huge stone in front of the garden tomb. But the real issue is that the government seal on the stone would have been broken if there was any movement. This was a civil crime. The tomb is secured with seal and guards, and nothing can change that. But someone did! The government seal was broken forever and no lies can stop the real news from leaking out. 'He is not here: he is risen.'

So, what difference is this going to make to those who first followed Jesus and to the countless millions since?

Fear became courage: the nature of their lives in communities changed: they prayed together, they celebrated the Lord's Supper together, they studied the Scriptures i.e. the OT together. More remarkable was that people were healed through their ministry and there was not a needy person within their faith community because they shared what they had and non-one went without. They treated as family those who were not family. They became a channel of God's liberating love and in so doing suffered for doing what was right. The resurrection of Jesus transformed the first Christians.

As we experience anew the presence of the risen Christ we are commanded to fight for justice, heal the sick, feed the hungry, provide for the needy, make the broken whole, lift up the downtrodden, welcome the outcast, speak out for those unable to speak, denounce policies and practices that dehumanize and marginalize others, be willing to put ourselves on the line.

The resurrection is not a doctrine that needs to be defended but is an experience that is to be lived.

Hang on a bit we might well say, how can we ordinary people do that?
I still receive great comfort in recalling the old, old story.

The disciples, having returned home, are doing what they usually do – fishing. That's their job. All night they fish but nothing is caught. Now that's enough to make a grown man cry, so they head for the shore. Guess what? Jesus is there but they don't recognize him – too much has happened.

'Good morning,' he says, 'did you catch anything for breakfast?'

'No way.'

'Try throwing the net on the other side.'

Jeepers!

Nothing to lose – so they did.

There were hoards of fish!

Well I'll be beggared!

John looked away from the fish to the shore to see who had passed on the good news.

It was Jesus!

Peter looked up and recognized him too.

Peter's heart leapt and he dived into the water.

The other fishermen came too pulling the net full of fish.

Soon the welcome homely sound of invitation met their hungry ears.

'Breakfast is ready'.

Not bacon and eggs but BBQ'd fish and bread.

Everyone of them knew that Jesus was their host and, just as he had done in the upper room a few days before, Jesus gave them bread – but this time with fish.

How do we relay the truth of Christ's resurrection?

In the every-day-ness of living.

In sharing hospitality with those near to us.

My dear mother used to cook tommy ruffs on Easter Sunday and lay them on buttered toast with lemon. The simplicity of it beggars belief.

Christ is risen. Hallelujah.

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!



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