

“Looking for the Risen Lord.”

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” That was the question some angels ask of the women who had come to the tomb of Jesus. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

But that’s not exactly what they were doing, was it? No. They came to the tomb looking for a body. And that’s because a few days earlier they watched as Jesus was beaten and crucified. They watched as Jesus died. And, they watched as his body was wrapped and placed into a tomb. So, what else could they have been looking for?

That’s a very good question. Because I’m sure those women must have known about all those other people whom Jesus had raised from the dead: There was the son of a widow from the village of Nain. There was the daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus. And there was his friend Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. All three had died, and Jesus had raised them from the dead. But it didn’t seem to occur to those women at the tomb, that the very same thing might happen to Jesus.

And that strikes me as odd, because *everything* that had happened thus far, had been predicted by Jesus. Numerous times he told them: that he’d be betrayed and arrested, and he was; that he’ be tried and executed, and he was; and that, on the third day, he’ be raised from the dead. If you thought about it, as far as those women were concerned, Jesus was batting a thousand. So why did they go to the tomb looking for a dead body?

Well, I think the *death* of Jesus was different for them, simply because *Jesus* was different for them. He was their teacher, and companion; he was their confident, and friend. It was *Jesus* who welcomed them without judgment. It was *Jesus* who loved them unconditionally. And in a culture that did not highly regard women, when they were with Jesus, he treated them like they were his equals. And so, I suppose that when you’ve lost someone like that, it’s easy to lose hope.

So maybe I shouldn’t be too surprised that those women went to the tomb expecting to find a body. But what they found is something the Church has been proclaiming for 2,000 years: What they found was an empty tomb. And what they would shortly all experience, was a new kind of life in the Risen Lord. And on every Sunday since then, the people of God have been gathering to proclaim the empty tomb, and the Risen Lord.

However, even though we have 2,000 years of history and witness to inform us, how often are we still like those women, looking among the dead for someone who is alive? How often have we looked for the Risen Lord in our traditions? In our heritage? In our familiar practices? Probably far too often; and especially when we consider that, in Matthew 25, Jesus told us where we might find him. That is: When we give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, we are encountering the Risen Lord. When we welcome the stranger and clothe the naked, we are encountering the Risen Lord. When we tend the sick, and visit those in prison, we are encountering the Risen Lord.

And how do we know that? Because in that same chapter, Jesus also said:

Whenever you've done these things to those in need, you did it to me. That was me!

And so, if you're not sure you've ever encountered the Risen Lord, I have good news for you. You have!

Now, you may be wondering, What going to happen when I encounter the Risen Lord? Well, in some of the earliest stories of Church we have examples of what happens.

Take those women at the tomb, for example: They were devastated at the death of their friend, Jesus. But when they encountered the Risen Lord, they were filled with *joy*.

Many of the disciples of Jesus were hiding, because they were afraid that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them. But when they encountered the Risen Lord, they were filled with *peace*.

Later that same day, a couple of Jesus' other followers were traveling on the road to Emmaus. They were discouraged and disappointed, because they thought that their hopes and dreams had died with Jesus. But when they encountered the Risen Lord, they were filled with *new hope*.

Finally, there was the disciple Thomas. He hadn't been around when the Risen Lord appeared to the others, and he refused to believe their stories. But when Thomas encountered the Risen Lord, he was filled with *assurance*.

Now, even though these things happened over 2,000 years ago, there are a lot of people living today who could some joy, or peace, or hope, or assurance. A lot of those

people are in this very room. And so, the Good News of the Gospel on this Easter Sunday is that people are *still* encountering the Risen Lord even in the ordinary times and places in their lives. I'd like to share with you a couple of my own stories.

I was 17 years old, and about to start college. I arrived early for church one Sunday, so I chose an empty pew and sat quietly with my eyes closed. When I opened my eyes, there was an elderly woman I did not know sitting next to me. She leaned towards me and asked, "Will you be studying for the priesthood?" I told her no; that I was planning to study architecture. She seemed to ponder this for a few moments before saying, "I think you'd be a good priest."

I never saw her again. But several years later, when I was about to enter seminary, I remembered that conversation, and realized that I'd had an encounter with the Risen Lord. And that knowledge filled me with a sense that I was going to be alright.

This second story is a little odd, but bear with me.

One day about four years ago, I brought my dog Jack to work with me. At some point, a woman came into my office feeling really, *really* blue, and needing to talk to someone. So I invited her to sit, and I listened.

All of a sudden, Jack jumped into her lap. Before I could tell him to get down, she told me it was alright. So she continued to talk, stroking Jack at the same time, and Jack just sat in her lap, staring fixedly into her eyes. Before long, the woman began to relax and smile, and she said to me: "Jack is an angel." My first thought was "Lady, you don't know Jack!" But then, the realization hit me— and I hesitate to say this— but the realization hit me that this woman was having an encounter with the Risen Lord *through my dog*.

Naturally, part of me was delighted that God had reached out to her. But another part of me was feeling a little put-out; maybe even a little chagrined; after all, I'm a qualified and experienced pastoral care-giver; I've been with people in all sorts and conditions of life; and I'm sitting right in front of her, available to this woman. And yet, for whatever reason, God chose to minister to her through my Welsh Terrier? Whatever, God! Whatever.

But the point I'm trying to make is that each of us will have *many* encounters with the Risen Lord during our lifetimes. That's a guarantee. But the thing is we can never know when that will be, where it will take place, or even how it will occur. And so that means we need to be vigilant; that we need to pay attention; we need to be watching and waiting for those encounters. Because they *will* take place.

My friends: Because of the resurrection, we can never look at the world through the same eyes. And because of the resurrection, we *can* hope to encounter the Risen Lord: in almost any *thing*; in almost any *place*; and in almost any *person*. And, because of the resurrection, we have the assurance that the Risen Lord is *always with us*. He's with us in our triumphs, and in our tragedies. He's with us in our hopes, and in our disappointments. He's with us in our life, and he's with us in our death.

And so, as I wrap up my remarks, I want you to remember the words of the angels: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has been raised."

And raised he is! And not just into a world 2,000 years ago, but raised also in *our* world, and in our *lives*, and in our *hearts*. And in the end, and on days like this, that's why we can shout with joy: "Alleluia. Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia!"