

The Great Easter Vigil Year C

Romans 6:3-11
Psalm 114
Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection story in Luke's Gospel gives us some interesting facts that do not appear in the other gospel accounts. There are many ways to look at these differences - does this make for suspicious or, perhaps, fictitious tales? As one author explains, the four gospels are not biographies, but rather, four portraits of Jesus. If we were to compare multiple portraits of any famous person, we would see multiple ideas of that person. The same is true with the gospels - they are portraits of Jesus, created to provide the readers - both in the first century and today - with differing views of the Man and His ministry. Thus, we get four different accounts of the Resurrection story.

As we look at the entire twelfth chapter of Luke's Gospel, we see a very full day of activities. We begin at early dawn on the first day of the week. The women come to the tomb to properly cleanse and wrap the body of their teacher. The names of the women correspond to the list of Galilean women who supported Jesus' ministry from the beginning and who were at the cross when He died. Several of these women had experienced miraculous changes in their lives, especially Mary Magdalene, who had many demons cast out of her by Jesus.

It is no wonder that these women were perplexed by what they found when they arrived at the tomb. Just a couple of days earlier, they had witnessed Jesus' death and saw Joseph of Arimathea place His body in this tomb and they knew the stone had been placed in front of the tomb, sealing it. Now, the stone was moved and the body was gone. If that was not enough, two men in dazzling clothes suddenly appeared and spoke to them. I think any of us would have reacted as they did. Perhaps the questions asked of them sealed their terror - "why do you look for the living among the dead?" They had seen Jesus die and be placed in this tomb - how could He be living? Being prompted by these men, the women remembered the words Jesus had spoken.

When these women left the tomb and ran to tell the disciples, is it any wonder that Peter and the others did not believe them? Josephus, the great first century Jewish historian wrote, "From women let not evidence be accepted, because of levity and temerity of their sex." Maybe this is why Peter felt the need to go check out the story he had just heard. With his own eyes, Peter saw the evidence that convinced him that the story told by the women was true.

Luke goes on to tell of other encounters with the risen Jesus that same day. We hear of the encounter of Jesus with the two on the road to Emmaus, and then, late in the day, how He appeared to the disciples. In every one of these events, Jesus reminded those with whom He met how this experience they have with Him in this instance is a reflection of the instruction they received from Him in the past. Jesus opens their minds and hearts to understand and recognize all that He has said.

We, also, come to learn about Jesus through the experiences we have through our faith in Him, by being reminded of all the stories we read in Scripture, and having the Word of God opened to us by the Holy Spirit. Like those who encountered the Risen Christ on that first Easter day, we might be perplexed by what we see, astonished by the reality of the Resurrection, and awestruck by the audacity of God's power. But, this is the encounter Jesus wants each of us to experience on this day as we celebrate the first Eucharist of this festal season. Jesus is alive, He lives, today and every day in our lives.