

“Come & See ~ Go & Tell”

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Matthew 28:1-10 = the empty tomb

Many years ago Celia Caldwell was leading Children’s Church at the congregation I served in Dallas. It was Easter and as expected there was an overflow crowd in the children’s chapel. Celia was hard pressed to keep the lesson going.



She finally tried a different track: “What is Easter?” Hands went up ~ lots of answers involving rabbits, decorating eggs, candy, new clothes and pretty hats. Christopher Reed, age four was beside himself, jumping up and down, stretching his hand as high as he could. Finally he just couldn’t hold it any longer. He blurted out:



“Mrs. Caldwell!!! Jesus is alive!”

Isn’t that the point ~ the real point of Easter? It’s easy to see why most of the children couldn’t come up the answer we know is correct. We adults ourselves may have modeled behaviors more focused on the peripherals than the core message.

We all see the cultural accretions which have been added over the centuries: flowers, egg hunts, fluffy bunnies, fashion parades. The word ‘Easter’ itself comes from a pagan festival celebrating the rites of spring. As important as these have become as parts of our celebration of new life offered through Jesus, none of these should ever obscure the main event. Out of the mouth of babes:



“Mrs. Caldwell!!! Jesus is alive!”

“A little child shall lead” us ~ into the truth about Easter.

The morning of the first Easter begins with the Twelve in hiding, scattered, cowering in fear for their lives. Mary of Magdala is no less fearful, but drained by weeping until there are no tears left, her desire to perform last rites overpowers her fear filled heart. She creeps as quietly as she can to the tomb along with another disciple, Mary of Bethany.



Unexpectedly there is a great upheaval of the earth, lightning and an angel in white descends. The giant stone sealing the tomb skipped like a pebble across a lake. The guards are paralyzed with fear. And here is this angel saying to the two Mary's:

“Do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid?” How could anyone not be cowering in fear after all that has transpired over the last days, arrest, trial, crucifixion, hurried burial and now an earthquake?

That first Easter began in fear. This is where the Easter story must begin if it truly is Easter and not merely some pagan and sentimental rite of spring. Therefore fear is where we must begin if we are to fully comprehend the Easter Good News.



When have each of us been really afraid? Not merely nervous, surprised or startled but deeply fear-filled, shaken to our core, fear unto death, for ourselves or someone we love?¹

I'm sure we all have experienced that fear. The fear that comes when we get that unexpected call into the office with little explanation, and the doctor comes in with a grave expression: “Tests have revealed....” and we can't remember much after that.

Every one of us has probably experienced that fear and trembling at some point in our lives. But when do we experience what the two Mary's felt in our text today:

“So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy”

When do we experience **“fear and great joy?”** The men of one Bible study raise a number of occasions: the birth of a child, taking our wedding

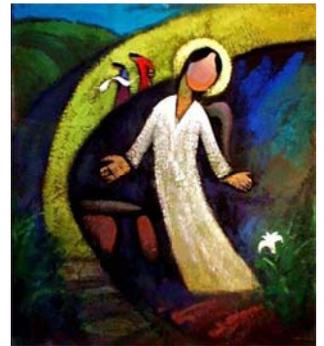
vows, a rocket launch, the creation of a new nation ~ every one of these surprisingly involving the “fear and great joy” of something new happening, of something new being created.

Easter begins in fear. We all know these fears. But then Easter moves to offer an end to fear itself, and the first glimmer that something new has happened, that everything has changed. Something enormous that has never happened ever before: “Jesus is alive.” Impossible! But true nevertheless. The angel says to the women:



“Do not be afraid. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.”

Even before they can find the other disciples to deliver the angel’s message, the two Mary’s meet Jesus face-to-face.



Don’t be surprised. We may encounter the power of the living God every day. Certainly we do every funeral or memorial service. In every Christian funeral we bear witness to the resurrection. As Henri Nouwen says, we migrate from the “house of fear” into the “house of love,”² God’s overwhelming, white hot love.

Tony Campolo, in *The Kingdom of God is a Party*, tells of a funeral he attended of a college friend killed in a subway accident. The church was filled with friends and family overcome with grief.³



The pastor expounded on the scriptural promise of resurrection. He spoke special words of comfort directly to the family. He spoke movingly and poignantly of Clarence’s life in a beautiful litany of memories of things Clarence had done for others. How he had served without thought of reward.

Then he addressed the corpse in the coffin:

“Well, Clarence that’s it. I’ve got nothing else to say except this: Good night, Clarence. Good Night!” And with that he slammed down the lid of the casket as stunned silence fell over the congregation.

Then a beautiful smile slowly lit up the pastor's face and he shouted, "and I know that God is going to give Clarence a good morning!"

With that the choir rose to its feet and started singing "On that great getting' up morning we shall rise, we shall rise!" All ... [the] congregation rose to [their] feet and started singing it with them. There was clapping and crying. But these were tears of [joy].

Everywhere [Compolo] looked, there were smiles amidst the tears. Celebration had broken out in the face of death. Something of the party that is to come had broken into that church. A foretaste of the joy that will one day be shared by us all was temporarily ours, a glimpse of the party prepared for all of those who die in Christ was had, and death had been swallowed up in victory.⁴

**"Where, O Death, is your victory!
Where, O Death, is your sting!"**

Now that's Good News.

The resurrection is at the absolute center of our faith: **"Do not be afraid. Jesus is not here; for he has been raised."** The Good News does not end there. It gets even better:

"Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead.'"

"Come & See ~ Go & Tell." That's all we need to know about sharing the Gospel. All we need to know about mission and evangelism, as plain as day. Come and see the empty tomb, the marvelous things God is doing, has done, will be doing. But **"come and see"** is not enough.

There are quite a number of churches which have as their Mission Statement just the words, **"Come & See."** But that's only half the Biblical message. That reduces the angel's vaulted words to merely an invitation, passive, inward directed.

Yet, the outward directed second part is of even greater importance: we are to bear witness to the resurrection. **"Go & Tell"** others about what God is doing, has done, will be doing in and through Jesus, in and through our



Jesus inspired church, in and through us: an invitation and even more a commission:

“Come & See ~ Go & Tell.”

Simple ~ simple enough for even children to grasp: this Good News we are to go and tell across the earth?

“Mrs. Caldwell!! Jesus is alive!”

“Mary!! Jesus is alive!”

“Peter, James and John!! Jesus is alive!”

“Clarence!! Jesus is alive!”

“Everyone!! Jesus is alive!”



¹ *Lectionary Homiletics*, 3/27/2005, pp. 66-7

² *Ibid*, p. 67

³ Tony Campolo, *The Kingdom of God is a Party* (Word: 1990), p129.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 129-30.