

Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown MD
Readings: Psalm 118: 21-29; John 20: 1-18

“He is Risen --- No Foolin”

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Early, on the second day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other disciples were still gathered in the house and room where Jesus had come and stood among them as he promised. They were still trying to grasp what he had said and trying to convince Thomas, who hadn't been there, that it was true. Jesus who had been dead was now resurrected. He still had the wounds on his feet, in his hands and side but he was fully, wholly alive. But he was different, too. Mary hadn't recognized Jesus when she first saw him in the garden where the tomb had been. He didn't use the door to enter the room. But he could sit, touch, eat and drink. Jesus was alive but more. The disciples marveled. They began to remember things Jesus had said that hadn't made sense. They began to share the stories of his ministry, parables and other teachings. Something remarkable was happening.

Early on the second day of the week, there were some other strange happenings, too. Jacob the pawnshop owner was having a slow day when an off duty Roman soldier came into the shop. It made him nervous. Was it trouble or opportunity? He hadn't become successful without a bit of fearlessness.

“Good morning, sir. How may I help you?”

“I have this tunic. It's seamless. All one piece. Made by a class-A weaver. What will you give me for it?”

“May I?” Jacob asked, reaching out his hand to take the tunic.

After a few minutes of close examination, Jacob asked him, where he had gotten it. “Won it at a dice game last Friday.”

“Hmmm — someone must have really been losing to give the tunic off their back?”

“Well, you might say that...”

“Looks like it has been washed recently.”

“Yeah, my wife was determined to get any stains out.”

“I’m surprised she didn’t want to keep it if it is as well-woven as you say.”

“Oh it is. My Leah is just a little superstitious.”

“About what?”

“Well, you see this belonged to the man Jesus.”

“The one executed last Friday?”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“The word is that he’s been seen alive...”

“How could that be?”

“It can’t be. I saw him die myself. I put a spear in his side to confirm it. He was taken down and given to some hot shot from Arimathea. He put him in a tomb in a garden not far from where we had executed him.”

“Yeah, I know the place. I’ve been thinking of buying me and the wife a tomb there myself.” “

Well, you might want to think twice about that. Some of his friends went to the tomb yesterday and found it empty.”

“Someone took the body?”

“That’s what they thought, too. But one of the women who hung out with him saw him in the garden. He walked up to her and talked.”

“A woman’s foolish tale.”

“Well, that’s not what my wife thinks. She heard this Jesus visited the other disciples in a locked room.”

“Mass hallucination by some grieving fools.”

“Probably, but my wife won’t let this tunic in the house. Says she’s afraid Jesus will come looking for it.”

“Women!”

“Yeah, but my Leah’s a keeper. So what will you give me for this tunic?”

“Well, it might be hard to sell with all the rumors.”

“Then again, it might become a valuable, novelty piece... you know, like a napkin used by Elvis or a glove from Michael Jackson that have sold for thousands.” “Hmmm. I’m not sure this Jesus will ever get as famous as all that.....”

Across the street, at the local spices, there were some women haggling with the storeowners. “What do you mean you won’t give us our money back? We bought them from you. The seals on the jars have not been broken. We’ve been good customers.”

“Yes, I know you and Clopas have been loyal customers. I do appreciate your business and all the referral. Let me see Mary from Magdala and Salome, they’ve been very generous.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I have their jars of burial ointments here, too. There a little... well, busy and asked me to return it for them since I was already coming.” “But madam.”

“But madam what? We bought these rather costly spices to anoint Jesus.”

“Yes, I was sorry to hear about your friend’s uh... death and burial last Friday. I don’t understand why you didn’t use the spices....”

“Well, it was too late in the day to do a proper burial with Sabbath beginning at sunset. We never got to use them.”

“But surely you still want to give him a proper burial with these lovely spices you bought just for him.”

“That’s just it. There’s no body to anoint.”

“What, what do you mean?”

“We went yesterday to take care of things but he, well he wasn’t there....”

“Wasn’t there? Where was he?”

“Resurrected. Alive. No longer dead.”

“But...”

“Actually we’re so very excited to be able to see him again”

“But”

“He is a bit... different, changed...”

“But...”

“But he IS Jesus. We saw his wounds from that terrible crucifixion and we spent time together with him...”

“But...”

“So you see, we just don’t need these burial spices for a man who is resurrected. Now be reasonable. You know we’ll come back again... Well, there you go. How about giving us store credit to use the next time someone dies and we need burial spices?”

“But...”

In the office of the *Jerusalem Times*, an editor is blowing a gasket!

“Kent. Clerkus Kent, you idiot, get in here.”

“Morning, boss. Bought you coffee and lox and bagels from that deli you like...” “Don’t even try to get on my good side. Thanks to you, I have no good side. Do you know what you have done to us?”

“Now boss it was an honest mistake.”

“An honest mistake? Reporting a man dead who has been seen alive by dozens of people? It’s April first and, thanks to you, we are looking like fools.”

“But boss, there were eyewitnesses who saw him dead. All my sources checked out. Jesus of Nazareth was dead. Not breathing. Spear stab to make sure. Those soldiers don’t kid around about executions.”

“So how do you explain the absence of a body, Einstein?”

“Still looking into that. Someone must have gotten into the tomb.”

“Got in or got out? How about the guard of soldiers?”

“We may be looking at conspiracy, boss. Someone paid to look the other way? Who knows how deep the corruption might go... Maybe even up to Pilate.”

“Ssshhh. Hold your tongue. You want to get us sued. Gad Zeus, our lawyers are already getting ready for a lawsuit from Jesus or his family. Man, when will you learn

to get your facts straight before writing someone's obituary? [*reading*] Jesus of Nazareth, died last Friday at Golgotha. Surrounded by his family?"

"Well, his mother was there and someone Jesus called her son."

"Nicknamed "King of the Jews" by Governor Pilate."

"Written right over his head, in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. The chief priests were pretty POed about it."

"Preceded in death by his father Joseph the carpenter. Left carpentry and his home to pursue a career as a rabbi and preacher. Will be missed by his many followers."

"Thought that was a pretty generous description..."

"Generous? The man isn't dead!"

"Well, that's what some say."

"No body. At least a dozen witnesses who have seen him. I think you better write one heck of a correction and then get to work on your resume."

"But boss..."

"But boss, nothing. Jesus is either dead or he isn't."

"Well there is one other option."

"What! What nonsense are you talking about now?"

"What if he was dead — dead as a door nail — laid in a tomb like any other dead person and...."

"And what? He disappears like Jimmy Hoffa or Amelia Earhart. He has been seen!"

"What if he was dead but now isn't."

"Don't start with zombie stories or I'll..."

“No, not a living dead zombie. What if he was dead but was raised from the dead.”

“Like that guy Lazarus, Jesus raised from the tomb? So, a dead guy raised himself from the dead. So we’ve gone from zombies to Houdini.”

“What if Jesus was dead but has been raised to a life beyond death by, well, a power greater than we ever seen?”

“What? No you think the Roman Emperor has a secret CIA project they’re trying out on some nobody preacher and do good-er in Judea where no one will care?”

“No, no... Not the emperor or soldiers or religious authorities. A greater power.”

“What could be greater than then the Roman Empire?”

“Well, God. What if God raised Jesus to a life beyond death.”

“You’re nuts. But, it would sure make a great story... quite a scoop. Only one problem.”

”What’s that?”

“Where’s the proof?”

“You said it yourself, boss. Dead than alive. Jesus said it would happen. That he would be the first and those who believe in him would be raised, too.”

“Died and raised from the dead so others can beat death, that’s your story?”

“Not my story, boss. It’s Jesus’s story — he taught about a way of living for God and then there’s life with God even after death.”

“You may be on to something but it ain’t news.”

“Oh, but on the contrary. It would be very good news.”

“Good news that won’t get passed our little part of the empire? It’s not as if the wire service is going to pick up the story. Now, Get on that retraction.”

“I think I will title it, “He is Risen”

“Geeeeeez — Risen, indeed.”

Something remarkable happened. That something remarkable would not stay local. It would not be dismissed as idle gossip or disciple delusions. The effects were only beginning to ripple through Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea. Because the truth is, Jesus is Risen, Alleluia. He is risen, indeed, Alleluia. And it makes all the difference in the world. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 3/31/19

I want to give credit to my colleague, the Rev. Chris Ramsey for inspiring these post-resurrection vignettes. Since his wit and insights are greater by far than mine are, I hope he will consider my simpler attempt as a complement to him.