

## EASTER DAY

***The women were terrified and bowed their heads to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? '"*** Luke 24:5

The women have come among the tombs – an eerie, death-filled place to be, in order to anoint the dead body of their beloved. But instead they find: an empty tomb, a couple of angels, and a strange reproach. ***Why do you look for the living among the dead?***

Why do we come to Church on Easter? Why do so many of us, who enter a church building at no other time of year, even, often, Christmas – why are churches everywhere filled at Easter?

I can't answer for all of you – I know why *I'm* here, I have to be!

But I have a couple of guesses. One is that people come, in droves, to hear the story of hope, of rebirth, of new beginnings. We come to hear about hope, and joy, and life. We come to hear about miracle. We come to hear about Jesus, the man who died and then, in unprecedented and unique fashion, came alive again. *He is not here, but has risen.* We come to touch, and be touched by, the possibility of new life.

But ... and ... I suspect that many of us come, consciously or otherwise, not only because of life, but because of death as well. Or perhaps, because of the dead.

How many of us were taken to church by our grandparents, on Easter, as children? By grandparents who are not longer alive, or by parents who have died? How many of us – the regulars at St John's, certainly – have given Easter flowers today in memory of beloved souls who are no longer on this earth? Is there anyone here, barring the very young, for whom Easter does not evoke loving memories of someone close to us who has died?

The story of Easter is not just about Resurrection. It's also about death. Death had to happen first.

And it's not just a story about something that happened once upon a time, to one man, long ago. The Resurrection, the presence among us of those who have died, is not, at least to me, a unique experience.

A few months ago I had a conversation at a party with a woman I know only slightly. My mother had been dead only a few months, hers, for several years. This

acquaintance told me, “It takes awhile for the dead to return and be with you. But it happens. Don’t worry. She will come.”

I didn’t really need this reassurance. Several of my nearest and dearest who have died are with me and always. My grandmother, for whom I was named. My priest, mentor, and soul friend, both of them dead for decades. After people have been dead awhile, they become more real.

This happened to Jesus. He dies, he vanishes from his tomb. Then he appears and disappears and reappears – on the road to Emmaus, in a locked upper room, by the lake, hungry and wanting a piece of fish. Sometimes he’s ghostly, unrecognizable, sometimes unmistakable. Eventually he appears vividly to Paul, who has never known him “in the flesh.”

And similar appearances happen to us, don’t they? Aren’t those we have loved and lost sometimes almost palpably present with us? Don’t we find ourselves consulting them, seeking their wisdom and following it? Receiving comfort from them?

And moreover, I have found that aspects of those who have died become incorporated in me. I told a parishioner a while ago that I thought I had become bolder since my father died, and he said, *Uh oh! Watch out!* I believe I took into myself some of my grandmother’s generosity and dramatic flair, some of my priest’s prudence and integrity.

And certainly, however we may explain the gospel stories of Jesus’ resurrection, certain it is that the energy and vision he brought into the world did not depart with him – not on Good Friday, not when he ascended, finally, to be with God. The disciples – men and women– absorbed that energy and vision, and went on to transform the world.

We come to church on Easter for all this – the Good News of the Resurrection, which is the Good News that death is not the enemy. Death is not the end.

We die with the dying:

See, they depart, and we go with them.

We are born with the dead:

See, they return, and bring us with them.

T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen