

20.04.12\_EasterSunday

God of Surprises, through these words, open our hearts and minds to the possibilities you hold for our lives, whether we can believe them or not. Amen

Every gospel tells a slightly different version of the resurrection story. Some have one main character going to the tomb, some have two, others have three. In John's gospel, today, we hear about Mary Magdalene, going to the tomb alone. In this story, she is not bringing spices to prepare the body, as in other gospels. We can only assume that she is planning to sit by the tomb and grieve.

Of course, it only takes but a moment for her to realize that something has gone array, and race back for reinforcements. Enter Peter and "the other disciple", only identified as "the one whom Jesus loved".

Three disciples, three different reactions to what they see.

Peter, needs to check things out, evaluate. I think of detective shows where they go in with their finger-print kits, their cameras, their little sticky tags to mark important points of evidence. This is Peter. And yet, the story never does say that Peter believes or acknowledges anything. In fact, despite the multiple appearances by Jesus that come later in the story, we don't hear Peter acknowledging him until he meets the disciples on the beach and produces a great catch of fish for them. Perhaps it was the location, on the beach, by his fishing boat, like his first encounter with Jesus, that helps Peter recognize and meet Jesus again, for the first time.

I think I would class Peter as a skeptic.

Then there's "the beloved disciple", who runs to the tomb with Peter, sees what Peter sees, and, we are told "believes." And he doesn't just believe, but he believes without understanding, at least, that's what the scripture says. *"Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.**"*

It's as if the beloved disciple really wants to believe that Jesus isn't dead at all, and so in longing for it, believes it is so.

This disciple, I think, represents the eternal optimist, who makes quick assumptions, based on circumstantial evidence, and is willing to bet his life on it.

Then there's Mary Magdalene. Mary who can't quite wrap her brain or her heart around what she is seeing. But rather than make assumptions, remain a skeptic, or live with her uncertainty, Mary sits with her confusion, asks questions and prays.

It is through this long, slow process of questioning and discernment that Mary hears her name and recognizes the voice. Or perhaps it is the intonation, the way in which her name is spoken that enables her to recognize Christ's presence and in turn, name him - Rabboni, teacher - and in seeing and hearing, she believes.

Mary is the contemplative. Willing to sit with her uncertainties until all is made clear to her.

Three different ways of coming to believe, to understand, to accept this completely implausible event. Because yes, it is as absurd a story for the first disciples as it is for us ... to imagine someone being physically raised from the dead.

But as one theologian suggests, "Yes, there is something in the story to doubt. There is also another way to put it: there is something in the story that reaches the deepest regions of our hearts and minds, where both doubt and faith are found. ... [A story] that is worthy of faith and thus open to doubt."

I think, if anything, these scriptural accounts in their various forms, along with the diverse responses of the disciples, give us permission to doubt, to question and to find faith using whatever means we personally require.

And so I invite us into a time of wondering. What category of disciple do you fit into?

Are you the skeptic who needs good solid evidence?

Are you the eternal optimist, trusting in spite of doubt?

Are you the contemplative who waits patiently to see and hear and feel Christ's presence?

Perhaps you see yourself in all of these, or none of these. What is it you need in order to trust, to hope, to have faith in the presence of a risen Christ?

Sharing ...

Wherever you find yourself in this story of resurrection may each of you encounter the risen Christ in the way that these first disciples did – with a newness of life and a renewed understanding of yourself and your place in this never-ending story.

Music video