

The dusk before the dawn of the day that would change human history; the first day of a new week; the first day of the new creation; the day humanity learned that the cross was empty; its work is done.

The day begins with the women on a mission; they had work to do. They didn't have time to finish anointing Jesus' body on Friday. They'd spent the day at the foot of the cross, watching, waiting, and wondering with him, *Mark 15:34 (NRSV) “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

The Sabbath was a numbed blur. What was the point? How could they celebrate Israel's hope that the angel of death would Passover them and deliver them from Pharaoh when Pontius Pilate had crucified the Messiah? Jesus was dead; they had no hope; but they did have work to do. They could give him one last gift of love; they could provide him with a decent burial.

The women arrive at the tomb; the stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away. Did they wonder about that? Who rolled the stone away? Why? Did they feel relief? They'd been wondering how they would move that stone; now, they didn't have to worry about it. They had one less thing to do, and what they had to do would take every last ounce of strength they had.

*Luke 24:5 (NRSV) “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*

The women weren't expecting to hear that. They weren't looking for the living; they were looking for the dead where the dead should be found – in a tomb. That was their mindset; that was the mindset of the disciples who heard the women's report and dismissed it out of hand as an “idle tale.” Dead is dead, and that is that.

It's not like Jesus hadn't told them this was coming. The angel pointed them back to Galilee, where Jesus said, *Luke 9:22 (NRSV) “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* Jesus taught them to look beyond the cross; the cross wasn't the end; it would not hold

him because death could not hold him, but they weren't expecting that; they could not imagine that; dead is dead, and that is that. Once a cross is filled, the end has come and there is nothing anyone can do about it – not even God. *Mark 15:34 (NRSV) “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

There's a paradox at the heart of the Easter story. We're asked to believe people who don't believe. The first witnesses don't know what to think. The first to see don't understand; the first to hear refuse to listen – it's an “idle tale.” Their bewilderment endures in the various accounts of that first Easter morning: How many angels were there? Who went to the tomb when? Who saw Jesus? Where did they see Jesus? What did Jesus say? It's not the kind of review anyone would like; if the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth had a Facebook page, it wouldn't have a lot of like's, and who knows what its status would be!

Some folks over the centuries have wondered why these witnesses didn't have their stories straight. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then why aren't they saying, “At 7:43 AM on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Martha (reliable witnesses please!), that is to say, Peter, James and John went to the tomb. 12 mighty angels who towered up into the heavens sounded the trumpet, the earth shook, the stone rolled away as a blazing light from heaven shone into the tomb, and Jesus' eyes opened; he sat up, and walked out of the tomb. Peter, James and John immediately recognized Jesus, worshipped him, and then returned to tell the other disciples who immediately believed the good news and rejoiced.”

Now that's the way to tell the good news! Nice, neat, tidy, that will get some likes and some smiley faced emoticons. Re-tweet that! OMG LOL!

Lies will do that; they're well-constructed because we have constructed them. We control all the details; the flow of information is in our hands. Who knew it, and when did they know?

We can't control the truth. It is what it is. And the Bible's witness to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth bears all the marks of an overwhelming

historical event that was so beyond the ability of those first witnesses to comprehend and communicate what they saw and what they heard that their efforts to do so appear inadequate and incomplete because they are inadequate and incomplete. There are no words that say what they saw and heard and know to be true – “He is not here. He has been raised. The cross is empty. Its work is done.”

We believe that, and sometimes we struggle to believe that. Perhaps we’re so caught up in our own personal Good Friday’s that the suffering and the sorrow overwhelm us; perhaps we’re enduring the darkness of that Sabbath, when our faith lies shattered and we have no hope; or perhaps it’s the dusk before the dawn and we’ve set all thoughts of what we believe and what we don’t believe aside; we don’t have time for that right now; we have work to do.

*Luke 24:5 (NRSV) “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*

We’re still looking for the living among the dead. We’re still trying to fit Easter into our frame of reference. This is the life we know, and in this life that we know dead is dead and that is that. We cling to some vague undefined hope of what tomorrow will bring, but resurrection – what in the world is that? So we define it as part of the next world (whatever that means) and set it aside. We don’t have time for that right now. We have work to do.

It is this outlook that inspires us to re-fill the cross. Our cross isn’t empty. We still have to prove ourselves. We still have to demonstrate our worth. We still have to make up for what we’ve done. Jesus’ death on the cross isn’t enough for us. We have a lot to live up to.

Jesus’ death on the cross is not enough for us, but it is enough for God. Jesus’ death on the cross saves us from sin; it sets us free for life. Jesus’ death on the cross is enough; His cry of victory “It is finished!” receives a resounding “Amen” on Easter. The resurrection is God’s seal of approval on

all the Jesus taught, said, and did. In him and in him alone, is life; eternal life now; eternal life forever.

When we join those first witnesses in believing that God raised Jesus from the dead; when we believe that Easter is God’s answer to all our Good Friday’s, then Easter becomes our guarantee of eternal life. Death no longer has a hold on us; we will rise again. Until that day, we get a taste of that eternal life through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit here and now; when “something” stirs in us and motivates us to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” to renew our daily practice of prayer and Bible reading, or to answer the call of the need around the corner or around the world by caring, sharing, and serving, we get a taste of eternal life; we are a sample of salvation.

When we join those witnesses and believe in Jesus’ resurrection, then dead isn’t dead; that isn’t that. God has something more – eternal life. Jesus is the way to that life. The empty tomb is the entrance through which eternity stepped into time and said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Believe the good news! It is no “idle tale.” Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and from the power of sin in this world. God raised Jesus from the dead. Don’t look for the living among the dead; don’t let sin and the power of death continue to rule your life through guilt and shame! Dead isn’t dead; that isn’t that. God has something more, something more for you – eternal life! Believe this good news; live this good news! The cross is empty; its work is done! Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah! Amen!