

Easter Day Yr C, 31/03/2013  
Lk 24:1-12  
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“Then they remembered his words”

In a Spanish cemetery there is a monument with a unique and happy design. It is a marble coffin with the lid open, revealing the place where a body had lain. A Bible and a cross are shown in the vacated place. Inside the raised lid are engraved these triumphant words: Non est hic, sed resurrexit! Translated the words mean “He is not here, but is risen!”<sup>1</sup>

Then there is this story, told by Pastor Timothy F. Merrill: I have a hobby that some people might think odd, if not perverse. I like to take pictures of the tombstones of famous people. That’s why, in my travels, I visit the local cemetery.

I’ve visited the catacombs in Rome and in Paris—full of dead [peoples’] bones, unknown and forgotten in history.

In Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris, you’ll find Guy de Maupassant, the writer. Jean Paul Sartre, the famous existential philosopher, is buried there, too, and Simone de Beauvoir, his life-long companion, is buried on top of him, or above him.

At Pere LaChaise in Paris, you’ll find the composer Chapin. His remains are right there, crowded in among thousands of others like Oscar Wilde and The Doors’ Jim Morrison. Napoleon lies in a magnificent vault in Paris. If you know where to look, you can find many others, such as Voltaire and Victor Hugo.

Some famous people are interred in churches. At the Church of Santa Crocia in Florence, you’ll find Galileo and Michelangelo. There—lying in a church. In Rome, the remains of popes lie in the crypt of St. Peter’s Basilica, and the remains of the apostles Peter and Paul are said to be in Rome as well.

Pastor Merrill goes on to say: I’ve got pictures of all these places, and the tombstones and markers of people who lie beneath or within.

But I've travelled to Israel, too. More than once. Every time, I go to the garden tomb where they laid Jesus over 2,000 years ago. I take pictures.

Every time it's the same. The tomb is open. It's empty.

He is not there.

He is risen.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another preacher, Rev. Dr. Wm. Willimon, tells this story about another cemetery: Travelling in the south of England, our car broke down. While we awaited repairs, I wandered through the yard of the village church. Eventually, I found myself in the cemetery surrounding the church. Over in one corner of the cemetery there was a beautiful, low, brick wall enclosing 50 graves. The grass had nearly choked the plot. A large granite slab, set in the wall, bore the words, "WE SHALL NEVER FORGET YOUR SACRIFICE."

Here were 50 graves of young men, all around the ages of 17 to 25, and all from New Zealand. Who were they and why did they die here in this little English village so far from home?

There was no clue at the churchyard as to who they were or the circumstances of the deaths. [Rev. Dr. Willimon] wandered down into the village...[and] found the town's museum and inquired there. The attendant at the museum told [him], "Strange that you should ask. I have no idea, but given a few days I could certainly find out."

As [he] was not going to be there for a few days, [Rev. Dr. Willimon] asked a couple of other people in town. No one knew. [He] surmised that they were soldiers who were stationed in this little town during World War I—victims of the flu epidemic of 1918.

No one knew. The impressive inscription in granite was a lie. We had forgotten their sacrifice. No one could remember.<sup>3</sup>

On that first Easter morning, according to Luke, there were a group of faithful women followers of Jesus who came to Jesus' tomb after the Sabbath. They brought with them spices to perform the last burial rite for Jesus as an act of love, in honour of his life among them. The women came, with deep grief and sorrow in their hearts—expecting to see the stone covering the

tomb's entrance. Instead they were surprised to see the stone rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they expected to see Jesus' dead body—instead they were surprised to see that the tomb was empty. No dead body of Jesus. Indeed, all four gospels tell us that the tomb where Jesus' dead body was laid was found empty on that first Easter Sunday.

Then, as they look around, there are two men in dazzling clothes standing beside them. They ask the women: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

What are you looking for, what are you expecting on this Easter Day? Are you, like the women looking for and expecting tomb stones covering grave entrances? Are you looking for and expecting, like the women a dead body inside the grave? After all, from a human point of view, dead people remain dead. When you die that's it, you remain dead.

Easter surprises us with the rolled away stone and an empty tomb. However there's yet another surprise according to Luke, which I think we can identify with. After the men in dazzling clothes remind the women of Jesus' words concerning his prediction of his suffering, death and resurrection, Luke tells us: "Then they remembered his words." Notice in Luke's version of the Easter story that the women did not actually see the risen Jesus. All they had to go on was remembering Jesus' own words concerning his resurrection. We too need to be reminded; to be reassured; to remember. That's why we gather here to worship. We gather as a faith community around word and sacrament to help us to remember; to share the Good News Story of Christ's resurrection; to celebrate Christ's risen presence among us; to live the promise; and to be a people of hope in the world.

The women remember Jesus' words, and then they return, turn around, re-orient themselves by going back to tell the 11 and all the others the Good News of Christ's resurrection. We are like these women, even though they did not see the risen Jesus, yet they believed his word and had to go and tell the Good News to others that Jesus had risen from the dead. Each time we gather to worship, we return, turn around, and re-orient ourselves to go back into the

world. We have not seen the risen Jesus, yet we believe; we greet one another and share the joyous message that Christ is risen from the dead. Covered tombstones, and graves with dead bodies in them do not have the last word; one day God will act in a powerful way to roll the tombstones away, open the graves and empty them by raising the dead to new, eternal life, resurrection life. Love cries out for eternal life; and Easter helps us to remember that God's love is stronger than death. So today we gather around the word and sacrament to remember and celebrate God's powerful act of raising Jesus from the dead; to renew our hope for today and the future; and to remember the promise that one day we too shall share in a resurrection like his. Hallelujah! Amen!

1 Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Illustrations For Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p. 268.

2 Timothy F. Merrill, *Lectionary Tales for the Pulpit: Series IV, Cycle C* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., Inc. 2003), pp. 65-66.

3 Wm. H. Willimon, "He Is Raised," in: *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 26, No. 2, April, May, June 1998 (Inver Heights, MN: Logos Publications Inc.), p. 12.