

I recently saw a survey that indicated that in a normal group of 500 Americans, 25 would have been hospitalized with a major mental illness, 25 are alcoholics, 50 are severely handicapped by neurotic conflicts, and 100 others have moderate symptoms of one kind or another. In that group, 115 of us have felt that we were having a nervous breakdown, 70 have sought help for personal or marital problems, one of us will attempt suicide, and well over half of those who are married would not describe their relationships as happy. Now, there is nothing morally wrong with being in any of those categories. It is just one picture of who we are. I think it is important to look at because most of these things are not things we want to talk about, especially not on Happy Easter morning. If unhappy things are part of our lives, we avoid them and keep them out of our minds however we can. In other words, we bury them in the past, in the deep recesses of our memory. We don't know what to do with them, so we pretend they aren't there. We keep them quiet and put them in secret closets where, like buried things, they become skeletons, quietly affecting our happiness. They remain there as long as we choose to keep them there.

Easter is about something God does with buried things. Jesus was buried, a beloved but badly failed embarrassment to all who had expected great things from him. Jesus was buried, and then the power of the Resurrection touched him. That is what we celebrate this morning. We celebrate that this resurrection power can touch other buried things as well, things like those pieces of our lives that we have not let go of but covered up and really don't want to think about. This morning I'd like to talk about the parallels between what happened to our dead and buried Lord on Easter and what can happen to some of the things we have buried in our hearts and minds.

In the Gospel story we heard this morning, there were three women, including our own Mary Magdalene, who went to the tomb. They had no plan, no solution, and no clear program. They did not even know how to begin since, on the way to the gravesite, they were wondering how to roll away the stone. They were no doubt dreading what they might find when they got there. This inauspicious fragile beginning is the basis for the great story of Easter. It provides some points for our own resurrection possibilities. Notice that, despite their fear and doubts, they did go to the burial site. Not really knowing what they would find, they chose to go there together. You and I tend to avoid that step. We do not like to talk about the things we have buried. We do not even like to think about them.....that regret, that mistake, that incident, that time, that problem. We do not choose to go and face them. Yet, the resurrection story begins with people going to face the ruined and buried past.

The second thing to notice is that they did not go alone. There were three friends who went together, people who could share in the story, soul friends, people whose support and understanding they could rely on. That is important. The third thing to be aware of is that they did not try to solve their problem in advance, the way you and I tend to want to do. They had no clear goals or objectives. They were not saying, "I will do this, and you will do that, and then everything will be fine." They just went to face the reality, and it was hard. Mostly we are afraid to face the things we have buried. This is one of the reasons we bury them in the first place. That memory, that embarrassment, that ugliness, that flaw, that failure, are things that upset us, so we turn away from them. But hard as it is, Resurrection begins when people go together to face what has been buried.

When they got there, they discovered that Resurrection had already happened. That terrible, smelly, scary corpse of an idea gone wrong was not there at all. Do you realize that there is no account of the Resurrection itself? There are only stories of the *discovery* of the Resurrection. On this first Easter morning, there was nothing that the women did, invented, carried out, solved, or cured. It was simply something they found. The Resurrection itself was done by forces well beyond their strength, knowledge, or control. It was a gift given to them, an incredible how-about-that, you-are-not-going-to-believe this kind of gift. The point is that Resurrection happens. What they had assumed had been buried, through the power and grace of God, was no longer there.

As a matter of fact, I think we all ought to get a bunch of bumper stickers that read, "Resurrection Happens!" and plaster them all over the place, covering up some of those other ones with their annoying messages. There are all kinds of less important bumper stickers out there, but this needs to be widely publicized. This is something that God does. I do not understand it, and I can't control it, but I see it and rejoice in it. It is something that God does, and it is something that people who have the courage to go look for themselves can discover. I am not saying that every problem in life has been solved. I am not saying that everything we have buried is no longer there and has been turned into joy, but a lot of it has.

When we leave the pieces of our lives buried in silence and darkness, those buried pieces begin to damage our souls. Our mental health has to adapt and bend around the secrets we entomb. We must constantly detour in order to avoid those burial places. Yet, most of the tombs we fear approaching are already empty. They are empty because Resurrection happens. Whatever we have had the courage to offer to God has been received and transformed. Easter is the discovery that Resurrection has happened.

We have buried some things along the way, you and I. There are things we do not talk about, memories we cannot face, parts of ourselves we do not like, chapters in our story we do not want retold, angers we fear are so hot that we dare not go near them, disappointments so deep we cannot look into them. So, we have buried them because we don't know what else to do. We are afraid to do otherwise. We all do this. Easter is about what God can do with what we have buried. That is what this celebration this morning proclaims. The challenge is that in order for us to discover that those things we have buried are no longer there, we have to face them.

What God has done, we call “Resurrection.” It is not like bringing something back to life. It is giving new life, different life, better life. It is not a return to the past but a dramatic step forward. I do not know how that happens. I just know that Resurrection is real; it happens. It has happened in my life as well as in Jerusalem. It has happened in many of your lives as well as in that of Jesus. I know that people who experience Resurrection are the ones who, like Mary Magdalene, have the courage to go to the tomb and face what has been buried, hang it on the cross with Jesus, and realize that it is no longer there unless we decide to keep it there ourselves. Easter is about what God can do with buried things. We have buried some things, you and I. Let us not be afraid to put those two facts together. Amen