

Telling Tales out of the Tomb

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed!

It was the morning after the Sabbath during Passover. So many things had happened; their heads were still swimming, and their hearts were very much still broken. “We didn’t even have time to finish with the anointing of his body,” one said. “I wonder how we are going to move the stone that Pilate ordered to be put there,” said another. You’d think these were the words of Jesus’ apostles, but they were not.

You see, the men—the apostles—were hiding in fear of not only the Romans but the Jewish leaders as well. They were petrified that the Jewish leaders would come for them next and turn them over to the Romans. Crucifixion was a gory thing and they couldn’t shake the images of their Lord being up there, let alone what they did to him before hand. They were there from the moment the temple guards “arrested” Jesus, bound him, and handed him over to the Sanhedrin. It was too horrible to even think about, let alone that the same things could happen to them. So, they hid in the room where they had their last meal with Jesus.

We know that it wasn't the men who were going to the tomb where Jesus lay. Somehow, the women, those who loved Jesus, mustered up the courage to go to the tomb. However, they found the stone had been rolled away and, as they investigated inside, discovered that the body of Jesus was not there. As incredible as it seemed, upon hearing from the two men in dazzling white, they ran off with some good news in the midst of everything so horrific.

And so they shared this news – Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the Mother of James, and the others – they shared it with the Apostles themselves, the eleven men who had remained so steadfastly faithful and supportive of Jesus's ministry. And in a move truly ancient and modern, the men – resting inside, dour in their thoughts, no longer mourning at the tomb – doubted the good news as an “idle tale.” An “idle tale,” told by the women who had walked with Jesus in ministry and in life; an “idle tale,” related by people who knew Jesus just as well as they did; an “idle tale,” for those mired in doubt – for those hesitant to recognize that miracles and good news can emerge even after the worst of news. But the Apostles, in their grief, failed to see – failed to believe

the commentary of their peers, doing so to their own detriment. They labeled the good news as “idle talk” – until, that is, one of their own went to investigate.

What is an “idle tale” or “idle talk?” Idle tales are “stories or conversations that are considered meaningless, unimportant, or foolish.” Some people will automatically label things as an “idle tale” simply because they cannot comprehend what is being said. In this case, the term was used for a variety of reasons. The first being that women were the ones coming forward with the news. Women were to be seen and not heard, and not to be involved in dangerous things. However, to whom did Jesus first appear and tell? The women! In all four Gospels, they list the women as the first ones to know or speak to the Risen Christ. The fact that each account involves women gives credibility to the accounts, especially when it would have been so easy for them not to mention them at all. But the repetition was so strong and detailed that it had to be included. Idle tale indeed...

Another reason that the Resurrection event could be considered an idle tale is that it was and is so difficult to explain. I can only imagine

the look on their faces when they heard the body was gone AND that the Risen Christ had appeared to the women. After all, this is why Pilate had placed a large stone as well as a guard at the tomb (in Matthew's account.) If the incredulous was not enough, then imagine their response when they realized that the Romans or Temple leaders may have held THEM responsible for taking the body and, thus, faking the Resurrection. Perhaps that is why Peter ran out for his own view. Or, did he remember the words of Jesus that he would rise again on the third day?

Clearly, this is NOT an idle tale. As much as we love Christmas and everything that goes with it, the pinnacle of our faith is the Resurrection. The Christmas story would mean nothing without the death and Resurrection of the Lord. The Resurrection event is something that needs to be told time and time again. Easter brings us from darkness to light and from death to new life. We have to be more than "amazed at what happened" and stay at home. We have to use the model of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and "the

other women” to unabashedly tell others that Christ has smashed the prison bars of death.

We are called to live out this thing that we have, this faith that we possess, and let the light and new life be seen and celebrated. We have to do this, not only words but also in actions, even in the face of ridicule, lest some Pharisees or Sadducees take issue with us living out the Gospel message. Some may even look at it as an idle tale. If they do, or if they try to drown you out with tales of their own, just look to the Empty Tomb as your proof. In the meantime, I hope all will enjoy a 50-day feast given to us by the Liturgical Calendar.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

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