

Bishop Pederson's Easter Message

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling cloths stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.'" [Luke 24:1-5]

Those of us who are early risers know that sunrise is the most magical time of the day.

When I was on the farm, the first move of irrigation pipe over the wheat field was at 5 a.m. I'd get up, throw on some clothes, walk down to the slough, and paddle a canoe about a half mile to where I needed to shut down the irrigation pump. That little trek each morning in the canoe was nothing short of heaven. The rays of the sun spilled over the mountain peaks such that the sky had a golden glow, the air was crystal clear and crisp and cool, the quiet paddling through the lily pads was interrupted only by the morning song of birds, the hoof-pounding of startled deer, and the warning tail slap by beaver on the surface of the water. The world and I were waking up together. Nature rubbed the sleep out of its eyes and came alive for the start of a new day.



It was "at early dawn" when the three women went to the tomb of Jesus. It was the magical time of day—the women chatting as they breathed the cool, clean air of the early morning, the sun beginning to warm the eastern sky. They carried spices, so that they could rub the fragrance onto the body of Jesus who lay within the tomb. Their early morning task was unpleasant, but they were determined to honor their Lord with this final act of dignity and love.

When they arrived at the tomb, what they saw mystified them because the stone that sealed up the tomb's entrance had already been rolled back. They went into the tomb, and what they saw greatly perplexed them—they saw *nothing!* The body they came to tenderly care for was gone.

Before they could recover from this shock, two men dressed in dazzling clothes appeared before them. The women were terrified. The quiet early morning, the magical time of day, was abruptly interrupted by, "He is not here, but has risen." They didn't quite know what to make of Easter.

It *is* hard to know what to do with Easter. Just look at the various responses to Easter morning according to Luke [24:1-12]: First, the women are *per-*

plexed when they see that the body is gone. Then they are *terrified* in the presence of the dazzling figures who announce that Jesus is risen. When they run and tell the disciples what they have seen and heard, the response is *disbelief*; these women must be sharing an "idle tale." Then Peter runs to the tomb to look for himself, and he is filled with *amazement*. *Perplexed . . . terrified . . . disbelief . . . amazement!*

Well, we can be greatly relieved that we have the advantage of being removed from the confusion and shock of that early morning discovery. The saints over the ages have given clarity to the confusion and replaced the shock with joy in what God has done. For we *know* what happened on Easter morning—Jesus rose! And we *know* what the empty tomb means—the defeat of death! And we *know* the implications of a living Jesus—life and hope!

So *our* response to the empty tomb is not perplexed or terrified or disbelief or amazement! Our response is that of pure joy!

A few years ago, Bev, our church organist, asked if it would be OK to use a brass arrangement for "Good Christian Friends Rejoice," explaining to me that the hymn would be played during the distribution of Communion. Usually distribution hymns are more quiet and subdued because it reflects the meditative quality of receiving the Sacrament. "But," she explained, "this brass arrangement is fairly bold. It's going to be loud and blaring, with the tuba rumbling and the timpani peeling the paint off of the walls." So, was it OK to do this arrangement? I said, "Why not, it's Easter." Bev replied, "OK, we'll *let 'er rip!*"

Easter is a "let 'er rip" day! No more confusion or quivering or disbelief in front of an empty tomb. Only pure, unadulterated joy in knowing that God is a God of life and that the resurrection of Jesus is the key to life now and life forever. Christ is risen! "Let 'er rip!"

Juan C. Pederson

