

April 3, 2010
Easter Vigil
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St. James Episcopal Church
Fremont, CA

If you have ever gone through an emotionally-charged or emotionally difficult time, you know, like I know, that it takes a minute or a week or two to take it all in, process it, figure out how to go on and deal with it. All kinds of things can trigger this response. A colleague of mine had a real head-to-head with a parishioner recently. She said it went okay, but she “took to her bed” for about 24 hours. And why? To recuperate from her own internal responses to the strain and the tension that led up to the confrontation and the exhaustion that followed it.

Emotionally-charged events include family arguments, someone in your face and threatening you, a general have-it-out with a co-worker or an employer, each has a different level of engagement. Sometimes deep sadness after a loss can put one in a funk for weeks, years or a lifetime.

The cast of characters in tonight’s Gospel reading have faced a shock to the system. The three named women, Mary, mother of James, Mary Magdalene and Johanna and a cadre of other unnamed women, have come to the tomb. And why not? They were witnesses to the crucifixion and now they do what they have always done; they go back to work. In this case, with the hurry up burial, Jesus’ body was not properly tended at the time of his entombment. The belief was, once you were in the tomb, you weren’t coming back out, so proper burial procedures were part of the drill.

But to add another twist to the story and to paraphrase the children’s rhyme, “And when they got there, the gravesite was bare...”

Two guys in shining attire ask them what they are doing. The absence of the body is one startling thing: The presence of two shining

beings is another. The shining ones acknowledge these women as Jesus' disciples. And why not? They've been with Jesus all along and listened to him preach and teach. He had spoken with them and to them, and he acknowledged them, too.

Well, how do you recover from this double shock? You rush out to tell the guys because you are one-time, over-the-top happy. And why not? These men had been his disciples, too. They were in pain over the loss, too. Let's tell them this astounding tale of reversal.

In something that is best described as roller coaster emotions, they found the disciples, minus Judas, and told them everything. Can you imagine their faces? Can you hear their voices? Do you feel the energy in the room with the women on one side of the emotional spectrum and the men on another? The men probably have a bazillion reasons why they think these women are talking just talking to be talking and are chattering to no good cause. Isn't that what the lesson says?

But Peter goes to see anyway, and why not? He has the most to lose here. True, the others had skipped out on the resurrection, but his three denials have to be sitting pretty heavy on the heart. It wasn't like admitting to being a disciple was going to get Jesus out of this political minefield. But Peter had weighed the risks, feared for his own safety and backed away from admitting he was a disciple.

However, Peter was clear that Jesus had not backed away. So, now that Jesus was dead, Peter had taken to his bed as he tries to sort out the events of the previous several days.

What is amazing about this story is not who IS here, but who isn't. Jesus is nowhere to be found. Or, as the men in shiny suits said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead"? And why, indeed?