

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In today's Gospel, we meet the first apostle of the risen Jesus—Mary Magdalene. All four gospels in the Christian Canon unanimously affirm that the earliest witnesses to the risen Jesus are women. In this passage in the Gospel according to Luke—two beings of dazzling light ask Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several others why they search for the living among the dead? Jesus is not there—they say-- he is risen!

They rush to tell the men, and—of course—they are not believed. Surely if something miraculous like this had happened, it would have happened to them! They conclude that the women must be making it all up.

But Peter isn't sure—Satan's "sifting" him to get rid of pebbles and chaff and impurities --and letting in the air that will lighten his being. He hardly dares believe the women, but he runs to the tomb. And the tomb is empty.

An empty tomb was a fragile beginning for a religion that began over 2000 years ago, and still flourishes today. Why is it then that so many of us continue to focus our energy on that tomb? On that morning? On what did or didn't happen there, and how we might explain it to those who do not believe it, too? Because no one can say definitively what happened in the tomb. No one.

Resurrection happened in the dark, with no witnesses to the event.

Resurrection to life in the world after death does not make sense in terms of what we understand about physical human life on this planet. No one has ever seen it happen, which is why it's helpful to remember that no one saw it happen on Easter morning either!

The resurrection was the one and only event in Jesus' life that was entirely between Jesus and God. There were no witnesses whatsoever. No one on earth can say what spiritual or physical process took place inside the tomb, because no one was there.

If we argued our faith on the FACTS of what occurred, we would lose every argument. Paul wrote just that to the church in Corinth—"For Jews demand signs, and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

Today when we discuss our faith with people who had never heard the story of Jesus, our recounting of the tale would seem fanciful to most and might even be dismissed by others. Yet, it is the event on which the church stakes its life and its witness.

Paul testifies about being raised to a new life in Christ.

Peter witnesses to the gift of forgiveness given in Easter.

Easter invites us to imagine, embrace, and live in a world where death is not the end.

Peter arrived at the tomb after the fact. He saw the linens without the body. The other men saw nothing at all, because they were afraid to be seen and were still in hiding. It turned out that it did not matter, because if we focus entirely on what did or did not happen in the tomb—we miss Jesus speaking to us right now.

The first clue about what life will be like post resurrection, is what the dazzling beings said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” We do this. A lot.

Rarely do we embrace the new with the fervor with which we embrace the old.

But new life, resurrection life, means that we will change.

Jesus addresses those who were his sisters and brothers, and say that in Christ, we find ourselves receiving those who were friends, and even enemies, as our brothers and sisters. Relationships will change and deepen.

The risen Jesus hasn't become the fearful agent of vengeance that some wanted him to be before his death—and that some still want him to be now. Jesus' demonstration of power is not power as the world understands it, it is only understood in one's ability to relinquish power. Our understand of power must change.

Our hearts change throughout our lives. As we age, they can either become armored, like a vault—or they can become more open, more pliable.

Our sense of what is possible changes. Dead dogmas, dead prejudices, and dead opinions fall away against the onslaught of new possibilities in this land of the living.

New life is here among us, and we are invited to become more truly who we are in Christ, more truly ourselves, more fully the presence of the risen Christ in the world. More alive.

So what changes after Easter Sunday? That may be the wrong question. The question isn't what has changed, but rather: “Who has changed?”

The story of Jesus in the New Testament is not just that HE changed, but that ordinary men and women are changed by our encounters with the living Christ.

What the Gospel asks us this morning is NOT—“Do you believe?”—it's “Have you encountered the risen, living Christ?”

Easter is not about the past, it's about the future! Easter is not about death, it's about life! And Easter is not just about Jesus—it's about Jesus being alive in YOU! Amen.