

Easter B 2024: He is Not Here¹

First of all, Happy Easter! Alleluia, Alleluia! The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

But...he is not here.

I said Alleluia, Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yes, as the angel said to the Marys and Salome who came to the graveyard, that may be, but he is not here.

But that's the whole point – I mean, how would we know – I mean, what did you say? Why are you sitting there dressed all in white, young man, and telling us this? Did He not know that we were coming? The sun is barely up, no-one's awake, and you're telling me...what? He couldn't wait five minutes? He must've known we were coming. I mean, He told us to. He told us after three days He would – I mean, that God would raise him up, plus it was the Sabbath until last evening and we couldn't come in the night, it's not safe out, you know what this city is like, but we're here now and you're telling me, what? That He's not here? Well where is He?

He has been raised, said Mr. Clean there, dressed in white. He is not here. Go tell the others to meet him in Galilee. He is not here.

Cry though they might, weep though they had to, the three women could from that young man no more information; nor had rest of the dead anything to say, much less their tombs. So they, who had come to anoint Jesus's body – and just imagine the sight of that, the smell – what did they do? What could they do? They went away amazed and terrified, saying nothing to no-one.

Whom would they have told? What would they have said?

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Um, Peter, James, John, everybody: we went to the graveyard, and the tomb was open. There was no body, just a dude sitting there looking like Mr. Clean Marine who told us he was not there.

Really?

Really really.

Where did He say He was?

On His way to Galilee.

Did he point the direction?

No.

Show you His footprints or sandal prints?

Um, no.

And you didn't see Him walking anywhere around there while he was 'on His way to Galilee' after having so recently been on the way to the supper not where He eats, but where He is eaten?

No, Peter, no. We didn't. I swear.

And this isn't a Roman prank or some priests' trick to steal His body, see if we'll claim He was raised, and then produce it on us to humiliate us, rub His murder in one more time?

No, not as far as we could tell. They'd have arrested us or something, right? The fella sitting there was all by himself and didn't tell us any more than what we just told you.

Ah.

And he didn't look Roman at all, or even Jewish – I mean, to tell you the truth what he most looked like was Mormon, dressed like you know how they do so they look

like the saints robed in white from Revelation and all, as we'll be on the Last Day, or like those angels in the Duré woodcuts?

Yeah, yeah, I get it. So this guy is just sitting there, like that, and say this.

Yep.

And you believed him?

I mean, I guess so. I don't know. What choice did we have?

You believed a stranger *sitting in a grave* when he said Jesus, whose grave it was and whom we *all saw die* on Friday, was not in there but was on His way home? And that we should meet Him there? Even though you didn't see Him?

No, we didn't see Him. All we saw was a guy who said, "He's raised. He's not here."

And you believed him?

I don't know.

You think we should believe him?

I don't know.

You think we should believe you?

I don't know.

No-one's going to believe you.

We know.

Don't tell his mother.

We won't.

I'm serious. Not till we figure out what's going on.

I don't think the guy was lying, Peter.

Then where is He, Mary? Where is Jesus?

I don't know.

Neither do I. All that we do know, for sure, is that He's not here.

For whatever reason, by whatever means, the God we've come to know and love decided to do things this way. Why? Because God did. People have speculated for centuries about What Actually Happened? and What Does It Mean? Fights over various answers pepper the history of our faith like so many holes in the side of an ark that won't make it to Ararat, even if they let the light in as well as the sea.

Questions about the reality and the meaning of the resurrection add to the list of questions we don't, and can't, have answers for. The history we have concerning them, the profound elaborations we have that draw from them, remind us of nothing so much than that the mysteries at the heart of existence will not be solved simply because we want them to be. At best, what we have before us in the resurrection of Jesus is Paul's term for him: the first-fruits of them that sleep. This, to the grieving, is either a foretaste of Isaiah's heavenly banquet – “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear” – or a bitter reminder that God raised His only son from the dead but won't raise ours. Nor will God raise our daughters, nor anyone else, not until the end. What we know most of all, as the women did that first Easter morning, is that He is not here.

Clearly, He wanted it that way. Clearly, He wants it that way. Otherwise, He would've done it differently. The God we experience as creator, designer, and imaginer, from whose hand the world went, in Geoffrey Hill's phrase, spinning – that God, God in that way, did it this way. It took the sting out of death as He did so, or at least took the venom from that sting. From the moment He gave up His spirit in shock that He really was going to die – gasping “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – Jesus has just been along for the ride. This is all God's

doing, God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, maker of all that is, and judge of all who live and speak with words, sacrificing Himself to Himself on that tree, much in the manner of the Norse father-god Odin – or maybe they learned it from the Christians, I don't know – in order to...

...well, in Odin's case, it was to gain wisdom, insight, the mead of poetry – for in poetry come all insights, and in poetry are founded all religions. Odin was willing to give an eye for it, all the better to see with his mind, apparently, and to create things in poetic form that were adequate to what he knew. Yet at the heart of our religion, the temptation to knowledge, particularly knowledge of such things as the difference between good and evil, is itself the temptation to evil. The sacrifice of Christ was meant to gain for God not wisdom, but love, through pain and loss.

Whose? His. Why? Because He, God, had made a mistake. He made beings that had the power to love, but also the power to hate. He made beings that had the power to obey, but also the power to disobey. He made beings who could create wonders and goodness, joy without end, but also who could create misery and torment for themselves and everyone else. That's us, if you're wondering. We. People, that is. He made us, human beings, in His own image, male and female from the beginning, equal in all genders from the beginning, but equally, dare I say it? Dare we admit it? Flawed – flawed because corruptible, flawed because deceivable, flawed because we had the power, the capacity, the tendency, even, not to be perfect. We had, have the capacity to excel, but also the capacity to just not bother, to be too damn cheap and lazy to, to do what no other creature has the power to do: become mediocre, but linger, or become wicked and endure. But we can – and we can because He made us that way. While it may have been good at the time, over time we can see that it has not been good, or not only good. So He came to be one of us to see what that would be like, feel like, to be human, He came to know what it meant to be capable

of sin, even if He didn't sin. He felt, He knew what it would be like. He felt, He knew that because of what it would be like, He had to die.

What it is we say in baptism? That we die to self but rise in Christ? That is what happens from Good Friday through to Easter Sunday: God in human form dies. All that is corruptible in that human form dies with him. Forever, in pain, and lost. Stunned, abandoned, and alone. What comes back, what comes to life, is not that, not quite. It's Jesus but yet not Jesus, Christ but changed, renewed, the first fruits of them that sleep and are raised incorruptible. They will not go bad, rot, or decay. They will choose good, not evil. The desire to do otherwise is gone, as is the fear of death and decay that lies behind that desire. Humanity is redeemed, made perfect, set free, made...as it should have been, not as it was. He repented – God, that is. He made it right, when it had not been. We sinned, or our forebears did, but He made us able to, and should not have. What did it benefit Him or us that we were that way? What glory did it give Him? None – and He knew it, which is why He died on that cross, and why He got up in that empty tomb. Once He did that, He did not wait, but headed straight home, to Galilee, Nazareth, where it all began, to make up for what they had lost, His family, His people, His disciples, His friends, and to show them that it would all be well in time. They would be as He now was, in time – be raised incorruptible, and be changed.

The God who made us, that is, set us free from what was wrong in how He made us, and in what we did with it. That is the message of the Easter gospel. He is not here? Nope. So where is He, then? He is everywhere, in every place a child cries, in every place a child laughs, redeeming us all, and making us whole.

Do not look for Him in a graveyard, Mary. Do not seek Him, Salome, in a tomb. He is not here. He is everywhere but here.

So get moving. Go tell the others. They'll want to know. I promise. *Amen.*