

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they 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 clothes 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. Remember how he told you,** while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? Remember what he told you.”

We Christians are people of the empty tomb. Yes, we are people of the resurrection, but our resurrection faith comes from this experience of the women who go to the place of Jesus burial and find it empty. Our resurrection faith is not based on any eyewitness account of Jesus rising from the dead. There are no eyewitnesses. All we have is witness of the women at an empty tomb.

How did these women get from being witnesses to an empty tomb, to being the witnesses to the resurrection? And how do we move from the story of an empty tomb to a resurrection faith?

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? Remember what he told you.”

Remembering is how people of the empty tomb become people of **resurrection faith**. **Remembering can make all the difference.**

Remembering brings us to the place of believing.

The women remember what Jesus had said to them, that he would suffer, be crucified, and then be raised from the dead, and they remember Jesus’ promise – that he would be with them always. By entering the tomb and confronting their despair and grief, they receive this message from God: *Remember what he told you.*

So, tonight we remember as heard stories that keep alive our memories of God’s faithful actions. **And we heard in specific ways how God rescues us from our worst fears – the fear a father has of losing his only son, the fear that comes from being delivered from oppression but being led into a wilderness and not knowing how life will be, and the fear of being exiled, cut off, dried up and lost.** In these stories, we hear how the people of God are people who believe and have faith in God’s power to over come all our fears.

When our Presiding Bishop Katherine was asked about faith, she described it, not in terms of an idea or a set of propositions, but faith as *the dynamic relationship we have with God*. She said: *“God can always do something more with the worst that you can imagine.”* (Parabola, Spring, 2007) Always. The women at the tomb had imagined the worst. Their Lord had hung on a cross and died. And, God had already done something more than they could imagine.

But, how did they come to believe this “something more” that God had done? They came to believe by **remembering**. *What did he tell you? When they remembered, they believed.* Their despair turned into hope. Their belief energized them in such a way that they rushed off to tell the others. No one orders them to do this. They just act from the sheer energy produced by their remembering and their believing.

But what about our own stories? Do you have a story of how God has been faithful and loving to you in a time of fear? Do you have a phrase that some heavenly messenger once gave to you when you felt hopeless? “*Don’t be afraid.*” “*I am with you.*” “*It will all work out.*” “*I love you.*”

I have a story to share with you. Paula Huston is an author who has written about her spiritual journey – searching for perhaps what she couldn’t name, but searching none the less. And on her journey, she traveled around the world, and visited Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, also known as the Church of the Resurrection. This church is Christianity’s most sacred shrine, for it is commemorated as the site of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. It is said to be the place where our gospel reading takes place – the same tomb the women discover to be empty. And, it is the place where Paula’s journey to resurrection faith occurred.

She describes her experience in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher:

*“During those few moments alone in the tomb, **I was overwhelmed by the sense of a powerful, loving, invisible presence.** The sensation was so strong, and lingered on for so many hours afterward, that I found myself breaking into floods of uncontrollable tears for several days following the event. ... **There was no doubt in my mind; I had been in the presence of Christ...***

Then I began to second-guess. After all, I was worn out from traveling alone, and anxious besides – what if I’d gotten a little hysterical? The more I tried to analyze the event, the more elaborate grew my theories. In time, I was miles away from my original conviction about the presence of Christ.

But, what I couldn’t shake was that overpowering love. I didn’t know what to call love on this scale. *I had never loved this way myself, not even my family. And yet it seemed that the one message I could safely take away from my Sepulcher experience was this: I needed to learn how to love people in a much deeper and more profound way.”* (America, March 26, 2007)

Paula had experienced the risen Christ – so strong and so certain, and then, so much doubt and analysis trying to figure it all out.

She goes about trying to understand her experience of love and trying to figure out what **she needed to do** so that she might live her life out of this kind of love. After years of struggle, out of the blue, one spring morning, she gets a message from God: “**Your journey is over.**” She realized that God wanted her to stop picking and choosing what *she* wanted her faith to be about – a faith that she was intellectually prepared to live with. **God wanted to give her faith.** And for Paula to receive that kind of faith, she had to let go and surrender to the gift. And when she did, she realized that her experience at the Holy Sepulcher had been the experience of believers for thousands of years. She was joining her story to that of others - the communion of saints who have gone before and who continue after.

Like the women at the tomb who had to tell their story to the apostles - our faith really depends on our relationships with one another, with people whose stories ring true to our own longings and desires. We need the experience of others who can remind us of the unexpected and disturbing ways that God touches our lives bringing us out of the darkness into the light – healing our wounds, giving hope, and raising up what is dead in us, not just once, but again and again. We need people like Abraham, the women at the tomb, and Paula.

What did Jesus tell you that you remember? “*Come to me all who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.*” “*This is my body broken for you.*” *Blessed are you who mourn, for you shall be comforted”*

Remember what he told **you, remember how he loves you**, and go and tell someone who needs to hear. You will be living the gift of resurrection faith. He is risen. Amen.