

I'm sure you have seen the advertisements. They come in the mail. They pop up whenever you are on the internet. It can be amusing to see what comes in the spam on your email. Lose 30 pounds in only two weeks by taking pills made from some obscure berries. Or make \$950 a week in only two hours a day without ever leaving your home. Switch your insurance and save thousands of dollars. Learn a foreign language while you are sleeping. Grow hair with their special lotion. (Not that one sounds interesting!) Or the all time favorite, you have been selected to receive a fortune from some poor soul with a sob story who happens to work in the embassy in Nigeria. All those wonderful offers that seem too good to be true. When something seems too good to be true, it seems to me that there are two possible responses. We can reject it out of hand, or we can check it out.

In the gospel, the women had gone to the tomb very early, before it was light, in order to anoint Jesus' body, and prepare it for burial. It had been too late on Friday to do that, and by commandment, they would not have been able to approach the body until after the Saturday Sabbath. But when they got there, the tomb was open, the body was gone, and a couple of men in dazzling clothes reminded them that Jesus had told them he would rise again on the third day. Well, that seems like pretty exciting, good news, so they ran to tell the others.

The disciples found the news too good to be true, so they rejected it out of hand. How frustrating it must have been for those women to have the best news possible, and yet the men thought it was just an idle tale. They were skeptical. Women were hysterical, of little importance. It defied everything they knew about dead people staying dead.

I'm sure Peter thought all of this was pretty unlikely too – and yet, and yet... I don't know if it was Peter's curiosity, or just a glimmer of hope, or the voice of God telling him "It

could be true! Check it out.” So he got up and ran, not walked, to the tomb to see for himself. and it was empty. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.” I’m sure that for Peter, everything seemed turned around. Indeed, the whole world was turned around on that day. But maybe, just maybe, it was just good enough to be true.

Perhaps that is why we are here in church today, even some of us who may not come every week. I wonder if for some of us, we might not be a bit like Peter. We want to know, can this story be true? Our minds revolt at such an illogical thing, this resurrection from the dead. It goes against all our experience. And so we are tempted, like the disciples, to dismiss these reports as simply an idle tale. But there is something else that says to us, check it out. It might be mere curiosity. But I think what drives us here on Easter is hope. We hope this story is true, we want the story to be true, because that means that there is more to life than this life. If the story is true perhaps we are not trapped by those things we regret doing, perhaps there really is redemption for us. If the story is true, perhaps there is a God who loves us, that we are not alone. If the story is true, then our lives has significance; we have purpose and meaning. If the story is true, then there is more to the universe than what we can see and touch and know. If the story is true, then death is not final, but is rebirth into a new, unimaginable and beautiful existence. And so we have come here today to ask, “Is the story true?” We have come to check it out for ourselves.

And so we have to make a decision. There are three possibilities. It is true, or it is an idle tale, or we need more evidence. I don’t think we can make that decision with our minds alone. Reason is not enough. We must use our hearts and intuition as well. One piece of evidence might be the very desire and hope that it is true. I believe that God often uses our

deepest desires to draw us to himself. Another piece of evidence might be our own experience. When we see the beauty of creation in a beautiful sunset or in the intricacies of the human body, for instance, we suspect the existence of a Creator. Or it may be our experience of being drawn into the mystery, of deep calling to deep. It may be in the lifting of our hearts when we sing “Jesus Christ is Risen Today.” Perhaps it is in our experience of other small deaths that have ended in resurrection – a divorce that allows us to find a truer love, the ending of a job that allows us to find a truer vocation, a broken relationship that is reconciled.

This resurrection business is a pretty incredible thing for us to believe, and we have to take other people’s word for it. Who can blame us for moments of doubt that all this actually happened? But that is what faith is all about. Faith is not the absolute conviction that the story is true and factual. Faith is our decision to hold the story true, to act as if it is true, to model our lives on this truth, even when we find it hard to grasp with our minds. We can do that because there is something about these resurrection stories that ring true to us at a very deep level. We can live the resurrection story because we need it, and because it gives us hope that there is more to life than the cynical bumper sticker slogan, “life is hard and then you die.”

And so on this Easter day, we have come to gaze on the empty tomb as well. We have walked through the darkness of Good Friday, experienced the absence of Jesus, known the longing for him who we miss so dearly. With Peter and the women at the tomb, we wonder in amazement how the tomb could be empty, how Jesus our friend could be raised from the dead. We can only grasp the meaning of this in any way at all if we let our faith and our reason come together through our understanding of scripture, and our experience of Christ’s love in our own lives. And what that tells us is that if Christ showed himself to others so that we will know that

he has been raised from the dead, it is so that we will know that we will be raised as well. In fact, we have already started being raised into new life in Jesus Christ.

The question is what do we do about it now? Now that Jesus has been raised from the dead, what will we do? How will we live the rest of our life? How will we respond?

Actually, there isn't anything that we *have* to do at all. By the grace of God, and by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are already redeemed, we are already being raised into new life. A friend of mine has said, "Now that there is nothing you have to do, what will you do?" Out of sheer gratitude for this gift of love, we are being called to something new.

Paul says that now that we have been raised with Christ, we *should seek the things that are above*. In other words, in response to Christ's resurrection, we are to live a life like Christ. We are to try to become more Christ-like, more holy.

That is not an easy thing to do. It means living differently, and that can be uncomfortable. It means giving up some of our assumptions, examining them in the light of the resurrected Christ, and that can be hard work. That is why we need each other, why some of us come to church every week – not because we have all the answers, but because we are seeking new answers, to learn from each other, to hear the words of God one more time, to learn how to bend our lives toward the truth. We come to continue checking it out.

This Easter story is not just the happy ending of some idle tale. In fact it is not an ending at all; it is the beginning of a new understanding of how God reveals himself to us, of how God loves us, how he reorders of the universe. It is a new *way* of living, with the joy of being near the presence of God, living with hope and purpose in the love of God.

It is that new life that we celebrate today, "Alleluia, the Lord is Risen, the Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Check it out.