

Easter Vigil, 2010: Luke 24:1-12 (Genesis 1, Exodus 14-15, Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 55, Romans 6)

1) Did we hear that right? *Peter went home*—why would he go and do that?

If something happens that is truly amazing, do you react by just going home?

-- *Busy day, Dear? -- It was amazing. I think I'll have a beer.*

Granted what Peter has just been through, I wouldn't just go home—would you?

So why do you suppose he goes home when he hears news so passing strange—

news he even gets partially confirmed (when he checks it out) by the body he *doesn't* see.

But, wait—when you think about it, Peter's got a lot of reasons just to go back home:

- Disbelief—*This makes no sense; it's just too weird.*
- Disorientation—*This is too much; I just can't cope.*
- Guilt—*If this is true, I just can't face him.*
- Terror—*This is scary; I just gotta go hide.*

I think, however, there may be a more basic reason why Peter goes back home:

- His memory isn't working right
- More specifically—his very *recent* memories are blocking his very *deepest* memories.

That fits with what Luke has just told us:

- To the disconcerted women, the men clothed in lightening say: *You don't remember.*
- And when their memories get a nudge, Luke says the women *do* remember.

And when they remember, they spread the word—

though what they say is, by the men (surprise, surprise), dismissed as an “idle tale.”

2) But wait! This isn't about “memory” at all, is it?

The resurrection, we are told, is what the British call a “one off event”—

a singular, unique, unrepeatable occurrence—something utterly, totally new.

If that's the case, then *memory* is of no use whatsoever here—Right? Wrong!

Memory has *everything* to do with what has just come down for Peter and the women—

and everything to do with what you and I affirm and celebrate on “this most holy night.”

3) We live in an age of news cycles 24-7.

“Cycles,” indeed—What gets served up is always something “new and different.”

Everything is always changing—and nothing ever really changes. Against the rapid fire backdrop “*which* snags our attention over *what*,” the Vigil in which we have been immersed this evening is curious, odd, quaint.

Old, old stories, told over and over, in laborious detail.

Genesis, Exodus, Ezekiel, Isaiah—Are we THERE yet, Daddy!

Who has time for this! It's just a bunch of re-runs!

Been there, done that, got a closet full of Easter Vigil T-shirts;”

besides, we already know how it all turns out in the end!”

There may be some nostalgic types who like that sort of thing:

- *Those who can't cope with the world as it is.*
- *Folks who find solace in fantasy worlds.*
- *Antiquarians who relish ceremonial retreats into “never-never” land.*

But what need have we of such endless reminiscing?

Well, a very deep need, indeed—a need like the first disciples had—

a need to recover deep memory—heart-memory, soul-memory, spirit-memory.

4) Yes, of course, what the women encounter (and the men—eventually) is not just the “nice and fresh,” or the “new and improved”.

None of them could ever have predicted or expected resurrection.

But *it is* something that their memories—not just of Jesus, but of their whole tradition—

could have led them both to *anticipate* and to *prepare for*.

They would certainly have been surprised, regardless.

But . . . had they been able better to nurture their deep memories,

those memories could have positioned them to respond more readily

to the total surprise when it broke upon them.

Well—no matter—the messengers dressed in dazzling white
do nudge the women’s memories; and—informed by a frame of
reference

that *just* begins to make what they have *just* experienced *just* barely
intelligible,

the women brave the dismissive incredulity of the men to whom
they speak.

And their bravery is not totally wasted effort—after all, even if he does
go home,

Peter does so “amazed”—hey, given a little amazement,

God can get great things going—eventually.

5) In the very next act of the story Luke records,

the Risen Christ undertakes some heavy duty deep memory nudging
of his own.

A couple of disciples are heading—guess where?—straight home—
surprise, surprise.

Jesus joins them; and, rather than blitzing them with a blinding flash,
or bonking them on the head for how clueless they are,

Jesus walks along with them—for miles and miles—in the wrong
direction,

back toward their homes of isolation and desolation,

rather than forward toward the Community of Resurrection now
gathering in Jerusalem.

Slowly, patiently, painstakingly, Jesus refreshes the memories of the
two disciples.

Luke tells us that: “*beginning with Moses and the prophets,*
(Jesus) *interpreted to them the things about himself in all the*
scriptures.”

You see what he’s doing, don’t you? Jesus is giving these two a private
Easter Vigil.

(It wouldn’t have taken as long, I’m sure, if Tom and the choir had
been in tow.)

Eventually the three of them do arrive at “home.” But it isn’t home
like it was before.

Jesus breaks bread for them—everything clicks—suddenly they get
it—

and just as suddenly, the Risen Christ is outta there—

leaving them to pass on a message that has already been
dismissed as “an idle tale.”

**It's night time now, but the disciples turn around and run—
back to Jerusalem to join the Community of Those Now
Themselves Resurrected**

**(If we were a bunch of Baptists here tonight, we'd call this a
Conversion Experience.)**

But listen to this:

**As the two disciples run to join the others, they say to each other,
with gasps of breath:**

*“were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on
the road,*

while he was opening the Scripture to us.”

**Deep memory, awakened; deep memory placing current memory in
radically new context.**

**It would have been nice if they had remembered before, but—hey—
God never demands a perfect deal.**

**God always plays with the cards that are already on the table. (Thank
goodness!)**

**What Jesus does for these two is not just repeat the old stories word for
word.**

He plays those ancient lines with a melody of resurrection.

He shows those old stories in a brand new light.

**The stories now make sense in a way that is totally unpredictable, totally
unexpected.**

**And yet in a way that—in retrospect—they have yearningly anticipated
for oh so long.**

6) And so you and I have gathered in Vigil this evening,

**Not just to watch and listen to a bunch of reruns in order to recall
ancient history.**

**We have gathered in eager anticipation of a brand new hearing,
an encounter with a resurrection we can neither predict nor
expect.**

God creates—Yes—Good.

God redeems Israel from oppression—yes . . . good,

**But wait . . . what about all that ghastly, tragic, collateral damage—
the bodies of the Egyptians, washed up upon the shore?**

**But *wait* . . . bodies in the valley of dry bones get reconnected
and breathed back to life, each and every one—**

breathed into life by the One who first breathed creation into life.

**But wait . . . those dry bones are Israelite bones, not Egyptian bones.
But wait . . . “Ho EVERYONE who thirsts, come to the waters”—
no matter what country you happen to come from.**

**And, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, God goes on to say:
“My house shall be called a house of prayer for ALL people.”**

**Oh my God . . . the home to which we might be tempted (along with
Peter)**

**to escape into, to hide away in, to make a fortress of, a battlement to
attack from—**

that home has been changed out from under us—

it has been transformed into an entirely different kind of place—

a place of prayer, a place of welcome, a place of healing.

**Memories rekindled are transformed into memories redeemed,
Memories reconstituted become memories raised to life altogether new.**

**It is into the matrix of such memory that you and I are enveloped on
this night.**

**THIS is the night—who knows what God will make of our deep
memory next!**

**7) What is it like to wait with eager anticipation
for a resurrection we can never expect?**

**Paul addresses that question in ancient words we also remember this
night:**

***“Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?***

***But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with
him.***

***So you must consider yourself dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ
Jesus.”***

Here’s the picture that St. Paul is painting:

Imagine yourself, the child of loving parents—

**but kidnapped at birth by captors who intend to profit from your
service as a slave.**

**Your captors incarcerate you in a house that is, in every way, far
from your true home.**

**They feed you on addictive substances that waste your body and
poison your mind.**

They abuse you, and teach you to abuse as well.

Your eyes adjust to the dark place in which they keep you.
Your ears become attuned to the same old sounds.
You learn slave language—and soon you can swear and swindle
as though you were born to it.

But your parents seek you out and find you.
At great cost and sacrifice, they wrest you from your captors,
release you from your prison, and bring you safely home.

It will take you a long, long time to *be* at home in your *new* home—
the home that has *always* been your *true* home.

Time and time again you will revert
to hearing and seeing and speaking and acting as though you
were still a slave.

For you, the practice of resurrection will be a lifelong learning curve.
But resurrected you already, most certainly are.

From here on in, however long it takes,
it is a matter of real-izing your resurrection.

You may have little clue of what that means from one day to the next.
It *has* happened, however, and it *will*—not just once and for all,
but again and again—always anticipated—never expected.

For every one of us, right here, right now:

This is the night when we come out of bondage.

*This is the night when we are delivered from the gloom of sin,
and are restored to grace and holiness of life.*

*This is the night when, for us, Christ breaks the bonds of death and
hell.*

And we rise, with him, victorious from the grave.

How wonderful, and beyond our knowing, O God,

*Is your mercy and lovingkindness to us,
That, to redeem a slave, you gave a Son.*

*How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined,
And we are reconciled to God.*

This, for us, is Easter—Alleluia.

