

We Don't Know Where to Find Him

*"They have taken the Lord from the tomb,
and we don't know where they put him." – John 20:2*

Christian churches around the world today will be filled with jubilant "Alleluias" and refrains of "Rejoice in the Lord always!" Those on one side of the aisle will shout, "Christos Anesti! Christ is risen!" and those on the other side will respond "Alithos Anesti! He is risen indeed!" The melody of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus will spill into the street as doors open at the close of services. Colorful balloons will fall from the rafters while trumpets blast and tambourines rattle.

With all the noise and exuberance, it can be hard to remember that the first Easter morning was not a joyous event at all. Jesus' friends approached his tomb riddled with grief and fear: What if they encountered Roman soldiers? What if they didn't have enough muscle to move the stone covering the entrance? And the discovery that the stone had *already* been moved did not in any way ease their anxiety. Had wild dogs found their way in and devoured Jesus' body? Had soldiers desecrated his corpse, hiding it where they might never find it again? Occam's razor would suggest a wide range of possibilities more likely than "He has been resurrected." For when in history had *that* ever happened before? What does "resurrected" even *mean*?

Hear the anguished words of Mary Magdalene relaying the discovery to Jesus' other friends: "They've taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." Listen to what the Gospel of John says about Peter and his companion who raced off to see for themselves, found the burial wrappings but no body, and left totally confused: "For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead." In other gospel accounts of that morning, angels let Jesus' friends know he is again alive, but even then, their announcement meets with fear and bewilderment. The Gospel of Mark ends with the women who discovered the tomb empty fleeing in terror and saying nothing about their experience to anyone.

All of the above suggests that if *this* Easter morning you are not feeling the trumpets yet, if you have more questions than answers, more doubts than certainties, more concerns than "Christos Anesti," ... well, you are in good company. The first Christians did too. It took many experiences beyond the initial discovery of the empty tomb and much time processing in conversation with one another before they could wrap their minds around the notion that Jesus was risen. And, honestly, 2,000 years later we are *still* trying to wrap *our* minds around all that resurrection implies.

And so every year, we take not just one day but 50 to celebrate the mystery of Easter. Because we, like the first Christians, need *time* to ponder what the announcement “Jesus is risen” means, and specifically, what it means for our own lives.

Never has this been the case more than in the year 2022. The past two years have brought many of us in Catholic health care to the brink. Rather than empty tombs, we have had to face overcrowded morgues. Because of Covid, the average life expectancy in the U.S. has declined 1.8 years.¹ Most of our hospitals face critical shortages of nurses and EVS personnel.

- What does it mean to say “Rejoice!” in this context?
- How can Jesus’ resurrection two millennia ago still be for us today a source of hope and strength?

These are the questions we will want to ponder as a health care community in the coming 50 days. We don’t need to have it all figured out right now; it’s okay if we don’t. But we know that we *want* to be able to join in the Alleluias. We *want* to be able to rattle tambourines and feel joy again. We want to be able to tap into the experience of resurrection.

And so, whether we come to this Easter morn doubtful or defiant, hurting or hopeful, sorrowing or singing, today let us draw up alongside those first Christians and ask them to take us with them on a seven-week journey through the Easter season, praying that slowly, step-by-step, like our earliest ancestors in faith, we’ll be led to deeper understanding and renewed joy.

¹ https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/covid-helped-cause-the-biggest-drop-in-u-s-life-expectancy-since-wii?fbclid=IwAR245wyZDXz8C-nQ_MRy6RAYdP-riU-uidsGRQb_rA3LbvtBj7nJm8d_tA