

**I** remember one night, when I was a teenager, an intruder attacked me the dark hallway in our own apartment. I was just coming out of the bathroom, when someone with something big and soft hit me squarely in the face. Then the intruder started laughing out loud. I realized, then, it was my younger brother who attacked me with his pillow. I was so angry that I screamed like a girl, so I hit him. Then he hit me back. Then I hit him again. Then he hit me back again. Then we were on the floor, wrestling. Soon the lights came on, and annoyed and red-eyed parents scolded us and sent us to bed. Actually, I did not scream at all. I thought I would throw that in for an entertainment value.

Have you ever been scared out of your wits, when you thought no one was around, and then some one said something to you from behind? What if that person was a complete stranger to you?

I heard from a soldier who returned from Viet Nam. The most scary thing in the battle

field was not the flying bullets or the exploding shells, he said; it was another human being. In the dark jungle, it was another human being that scared him the most. But I think the most scary thing is meeting someone whom you saw die a while ago.

**T**he Gospels present conflicting versions of Jesus' death. In John's account, it was Mary Magdalene alone who went to the tomb while it was still dark, but she never entered the tomb. Jesus meets Mary Magdalene in person after other disciples departed. And John portrays her as if she was not scared at all: she was just crying her eyes out.

Those three women in the Mark's account, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, went to the tomb at the sunrise, in agreement with Matthew and Luke who also puts the time mark at the dawn. The women noticed that the stone that blocked the tomb had been mysteriously rolled away. As they stumbled into the tomb, they saw a stranger—a live

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one—inside. Wouldn't you have felt spooked at least a little, if you were those women?

**I**n Mark, that fright is well preserved in the narrative. Who was that guy in the tomb, who has been waiting in the dark for the women? The women must have jumped out of their sandals, when he spoke. Then the women heard from the stranger the incredible news:

16:6 "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

The markan narrative tells the readers that the women actually entered the tomb. If you remember, in John's account, it was Peter who entered the tomb first, although it was John the writer himself who arrived at the tomb first. John adds, as if to compensate, that he himself was the only one—the first one—who believed, before anyone else, that

Jesus rose from the dead. The lukan account puts many more female visitors on the scene than Mark does.

The present preacher leans towards the markan account, however, for the greater authenticity of what actually happened. The markan account carries more realistic responses from these three women, given the circumstance.

**I**t is natural to be terrified in the scenes such as this. But in John's account, especially, we do not see any sign of fear at all, considering the fact that those men had been so far holed up somewhere in absolute fear. If you had been a chicken all your life, you don't suddenly become brave in one morning, because some women came and told you that some guy had been waiting in the empty tomb for them to show up, just to tell them the news that the dead man had risen from the dead. On a second thought, maybe, curiosity trumps fear.

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Anyway, while those men folks were trembling with their tails between their legs, three wispy women decided to visit Jesus all by themselves to clean up his broken body. You do not do this kind of things, unless you really, really loved someone.

The male disciples might have been hand-picked by Jesus, but their loyalty to him lasted as long as it was all good and convenient to them. It was female disciples who loved Jesus, and remained loyal to him, even after his death. It is obvious that the male disciples did not love Jesus as much as the female disciples did.

**I** shared with you last week that the story of the cross was a story of huge failure. The religious leadership failed. The Roman prefect's judiciary authority failed. The disciples failed. To the crowd of people who expected him to be the King of the Jews, Jesus failed. To Jesus, even God failed, for God abandoned him just when he needed God the most—although God had affirmed God's love to

him at least twice, once at the river Jordan at his baptism, and at another on the transfiguration mountain.

If the story of cross was a story of failures, then the story of Easter is a story of steadfast love. You see the ordinary women followers overcome the fear, and visit the tomb, in order to clean Jesus' broken body.

As far as any one could see, it was all over: the career dream died with Jesus, the dream of the new, independent state of Israel died, too; the expectation of the messianic rule dissipated like the morning mist. The hope himself died like a common criminal. He was now reduced to a cold, dead body. Yet these women still cared for him. There was something in their hearts that could not be quenched by the death of a person.

**I**t is this love and loyalty that overcome the fear and abject hopelessness. The cross was the symbol of the death to all hope. The Easter was the proof that God still works with us

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nevertheless, despite the abject despair. For those who remain steadfast and loving, God rolls the stones for them, and shows them that there is nothing to fear.

Everything in this world tells us that death is the ultimate end of all things. It convinced everyone, when God the father willingly took the label of being an impotent God who could not save God's own Son. No one expected that God would choose us over God's own Son.

To those who continue to love and remain loyal, bodily death is not the ultimate end. There is something beyond the bodily death that is worth far more than what the human eyes may see. The writer of Hebrews testified to us in 11:1:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

**T**o remain loyal and loving means to remain faithful. And to those who remain faithful, God provides them with something

that exceeds their expectation and imagination. Once we get our action going, based on that assurance of things that we hope for, God's providence works with us. God always gives something far better than expected, to those who remain loyal and loving. There is the new hope, the new life, and the new strength, even in the face of the absolute despair. That is the gift of the Easter.

Easter is the gift to all who remain loyal and loving, to all who are convicted of things unseen.