

“Can’t We Just Go Home?”

John 20:1-18

April 1, 2018 Easter Sunrise

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The Easter story is a strange story, and John tells it in a strange way. Later this morning we will read the story from the Gospel of Mark and they couldn’t be any more different. Mark’s story is one of drama in which the empty tomb brings terror and ends with the women running away in fear. But not John.

When Peter and John go to the tomb are they overcome with fear or surprise? No, there’s no drama here. They see no body and so they simply go home. For Mark, the empty tomb is the end of the story, for John it is the beginning.

Gail O’Day says that this is “one of the most beautifully told stories in all of Scripture and its beauty and power come from its simplicity and transparency. For the reader of this story, everything is right there on the page—nothing is hidden or held back. Mary does not realize that the gardener is Jesus, but John makes sure that the reader does. Note carefully the way that verse 14 is worded: “When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.” There’s no drama for us, he doesn’t say she turned around and saw the gardener, and then after he speaks, she and we realize it’s Jesus. We are simply told it’s Jesus standing there. Since we have watched Jesus be killed and buried in his tomb, and have seen that the tomb is empty, the Jesus who stands in the garden can only be the resurrected Jesus, yet John presents him with no fanfare. Why? Readers have already seen the empty tomb and so know God’s power over death. The fact of Jesus’ risen body is not the heart of the Easter proclamation, because God’s power over death has never been in doubt. The heart of the Easter proclamation resides in the moment when we are claimed by the truth of the resurrection.

Since the reader knows that the gardener is Jesus, there is no suspense to the story. Its power derives not from the reader's dawning recognition of Jesus, but from the reader's waiting to see what will lead to Mary's recognition of Jesus. The moment comes when Jesus calls Mary by name."¹

That's the moment for us too. The good news of this story is not that the tomb is empty. That's just the beginning. We can be like Peter and John, we can come to church today or any Sunday because we know the fact that we worship on Sunday means that each Sunday is a celebration of his resurrection, and after being here we can go back home, unchanged, because nothing we saw here made any real difference. Or we can be like Mary. We can listen for Jesus to call our name. Which will we be like? When Peter and John looked into the tomb, they saw some clothes strewn aside. But nothing else. When Mary looked in, she saw two angels in white. Why didn't Peter and John see them?

Lots of you know that I'm an astronomy buff. Erin and I like to go out occasionally on a clear night and look at the stars and planets. A few nights ago we were looking in the constellation Taurus the bull at the star Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus. If we had a better telescope we could have seen something special near there. On the 11th of July in the year 1054 at the tip of the bull's horn a bright star appeared. Its light grew and grew until it was the brightest object in the night sky. It was a supernova in the constellation Taurus and we know the exact date because Arabic astronomers in many countries saw it and made notes that were confirmed by astronomers in China. Indians in Arizona saw it and made drawings. In the South Pacific, islanders marked the miracle. It was bright enough that it could still be seen when the sun rose. For 23 days the astronomers of Arabia and China tell us, the supernova dominated the sky, almost as bright as the sun, the most incandescent event in recorded history. By August 2nd the great new star began to fade until it eventually was invisible to our eyes again. The interesting thing is that this star, which must have been the most extraordinary sight in the history of our observation of the heavens was noted in China, in Arabia, in Alaska, in Arizona, and in the South

1 O'Day, Gail. *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*.

Pacific because we have the records to prove it. But in Europe, nobody saw it. Or if they did, they made no mention of it. They lived through one of the most magnificent spectacles and nobody bothered to make note of it on a parchment or in any manuscript. With a telescope you can see the remnants of the supernova hiding in Taurus, but you can search every library in the western world without finding a shred of evidence that the learned people of Europe even bothered to notice what was happening around them. They were in the midst of what we might call the Dark Ages. But remember, an age is called Dark not because the light does not shine, but because people refuse to see it.²

Were the angels there when Peter and John looked in and they just weren't ready to see them? All that had happened to them, they just wanted to go home. It was Mary who was ready to see them, ready to hear Jesus call her name. It's not just that the tomb is empty, we can all see that. But are our eyes open to the angels around us, to the stars above us, and to the gardener next to us, who just may not be the gardener?

2 Quoted from James Michner's *Space*, p. 708-9.