

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at the Great Easter Vigil
March 31, 2018

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Every now and then go back to the title deeds of our faith as found in the various accounts of the Resurrection. The four evangelists are your source and guide. These accounts become fresh again and sometimes offer surprises you had missed. You will never be disappointed. For example, we so often easily accept there were angels present at the empty tomb announcing the Resurrection of Christ. In point of fact it is only St Matthew who says that *one* angel was present. The two figures at the grave in St Luke's account are described as *men*. And we should take it as St Luke says. Angels are messengers. They do not ask questions. *These* men ask questions. They ask "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Mary Magdalene and the others were doing that. They were focused on bad news. Good Friday had done that to them. It seems to them the death of Jesus had obliterated everything good from the face of the earth. So when they came to the tomb early on Easter Day Mary Magdalene and the others were focused on the dead. The question the two men asked was much needed and right to the point. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" To put it in contemporary language they could have asked: "Is there any room in you for good news?"

Bad news is what drives and sells print and broadcast media, and it hammers away at us day after day. Christian believers are not immune to being dragged down by this mind-numbing cynical secular world view. If you say what is false it begins to be accepted as true. We are even encouraged to treat good news as frivolous entertainment. Unless it is bad news we are conditioned to treat it with suspicion, as spin. Like Mary Magdalene and the others, our own hearts can be burdened with fear about what is to come, *and what is to become of us*. When fear is the engine that drives us, we cannot be the bearers of the Gospel Good News.

How easily Mary Magdalene and her companions were believed when their initial report was of a defiled grave and missing corpse! But later, when they said "We have seen the Lord" the apostles must have initially used words like *wistful thinking, delusion, or even crazy*.

The world is a very different place because of the Resurrection of Christ. Easter proclaims what Good Friday accomplished. It is the ultimate game-changer. The

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witness of Christians puts the focus on good news and insists upon the difference it makes in all aspects of life. Life is imperishable. Life changes but does not die. Divine life annihilates death. We even see great signs of this Divine ordering of creation in the physical realm, in the changing of seasons from winter to spring, and in the banishing of dark by dawn every morning. Our Lord and His Resurrection showed us the true relationship of death to life. Life is stronger. And life is precious not only because it is stronger but both precious and stronger because from God.

It was in the dark of night Christ rose from the dead. Nobody saw it. The first messengers to the disciples had to say “Are you ready for good news?” But neither before nor after the Resurrection did the Lord Jesus ever criticize people’s suffering or their being slow to believe. “Oh foolish and slow of heart to believe” is not the same as “snap out of it!” What the Blessed Lord did do in all circumstances was consistently, patiently, and lovingly, point to life and show us the way we should go. He said, “Follow Me.”

The bad news is all around us. Christians of all people should not be surprised by this. But neither do we give in to it. For Christ has overcome the world. Bad news is not the real story after all. Easter Day reveals the true condition of things. And the best news of all is not Christ *was* risen or Christ *has* risen but Christ *is* Risen! *Alleluia!*