

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Easter Day
April 21, 2019

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One of the delightful contributions of New Testament 101 in seminary is the discovery of books called *Gospel Parallels*. Albert Huck's pioneering arrangement dated from 1892. Before that, you had to compare the synoptic gospels by lining up three open Bibles to the passage under consideration and four if you wanted to include St John. (Remember, this was long before they provided us with desk-top copiers!) With the *Gospel Parallels* you could compare the different accounts of the Transfiguration, and all the incidents in the life of Our Lord. But no use of a *Gospel Parallels* is more rewarding than for our study of the events of Easter Day morning.

We so easily accept that there were angels at the tomb announcing the Resurrection of Christ, when in point of fact only St Matthew's Gospel tells us a *single* angel was present. (St John does mention two angels.) St Mark's Gospel describes a single young man. And in St Luke's account, heard at the Easter Vigil last night, there are *two* figures at the grave. They too are described as *men*. That is because angels are messengers and do not ask questions. *St Luke's men asked questions*. They said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" A modern variety of this question would be to ask "Is there any room in you for good news?"

On Easter morning Mary Magdalene and the apostles certainly were focused on the bad news. The crucifixion had devastated their capacity to believe any goodness remained in the world. When they came to the tomb at dawn they were focused on the dead. They came to carry out one last task, an act of devotion to their dead Master. So the question the men at the tomb asked was right on the money. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Is there any room in you for good news?

This is an appropriate question for contemporary Christians as well. We are not immune to being dragged down by the worldview and by world events. 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*. Just ask our co-religionists in places like Sri Lanka, many of whom spent Easter Day facing the business end of an AK-47. A new wave of violence on Christian believers has begun in Iraq just when they were returning home to rebuild their cities and their lives. At St Theresa's Church this spring the staff participated in a terrorist attack drill, complete with shots being

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fired in the church, and what our response should be. But like the followers of Jesus on that first Easter morning, when fear is the engine that drives us, we cannot be the bearers of the Good News.

Our world focuses on the bad. And there is plenty of it! But what about the good news? The report of Mary Magdalene and her companions would have easily been believed had they reported a defiled grave and missing body! And according to St John's Gospel, that is what they *did* initially report. Peter and John went off to implement damage control. But these women later carried back to Peter and the rest *another* message. This was the most significant piece of information the world has ever been given. But Scripture records no account of apostles rushing off to see the Risen Lord! Rather, the reaction must have been, "Christ is Risen?" with a question mark! How about that for a non-starter? No one could ever accuse the Lord's followers of being gullible!

The world is *a very different place* because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the job description of Christians is to focus on the good news about that difference. Life is imperishable. It changes but it does not die. Jesus showed us many things. Easter is the most decisive and life-changing message revealing the true relationship of death to life, and the preciousness of that God-given life.

It was night when Christ rose from the dead. Nobody saw it. That is why we have the Easter Vigil at night. But in the morning the first messengers had to say to the Lord's closest followers: "Are you ready for good news?" Before or after the Resurrection, the Lord never made fun of people's suffering and doubt. He never said, "Snap out of it." Nor was that being said by the two men at the tomb either. What the Lord *did* do was consistently *point to life*. He showed us the way we should go. His message in the Great Fifty Days of Easter has a constant theme, and you'll hear it repeatedly in Mass gospels in the coming weeks. "*Do not be afraid.*" "*Peace be with you.*"

The bad news will always be around us. Christians of all people should not be surprised or taken in by it, or that the world and those opposed to the Christian Faith hate us. But it is not necessary we should be overcome by the bad news. The

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Risen Christ has overcome the world. *All of it*. The events of Easter morning told Mary Magdalene and all the rest of us that bad news is not the real story after all. The real story is: “*Christ is Risen!*”