

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Easter Day
April 4, 2021

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Every now and then it is a good idea to go back to the title deeds of our faith as found in the various accounts of the Resurrection. Easter is the perfect occasion. The four evangelists are your source and guide. Even after 2000 years 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 announcing the Resurrection of Christ at the empty tomb. In point of fact it is only St Matthew's gospel which says *one* angel was present. In St Luke's Gospel the two figures at the grave are described as *men*. And we should take it as St Luke says. Angel means *messenger*. 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 just that. They were focused on the dead. Good Friday had done that to them. It seems 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 it was right to the point. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" In our contemporary language we might say: "Is there any room in you for good news?"

Bad news is what drives and sells print and broadcast journalism. 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. We are encouraged to treat good news as frivolous entertainment, or given space in the daily newspaper on a slow news day. We are even to treat good news 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*. The *Covid* pandemic has certainly made its contribution to this mind set. But when fear is the engine that drives our lives we cannot be the bearers of the Gospel Good News.

This is not just a contemporary problem. Mary Magdalene and her companions were easily believed when their initial report was of a defiled grave and missing corpse! Later, when they declared: "We have seen the Lord!" the apostles must have initially used words like *wistful thinking*, *delusion*, or even *crazy*.

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The world is a very different place because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Easter proclaims what Good Friday accomplished. The Risen Christ is the ultimate game-changer! That is why the witness of Christians puts the focus on good news and insists upon the difference this makes in all aspects of life. Physical life does indeed have an ending. But life itself is imperishable. 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 darkness by dawn every morning. Our Lord Jesus 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 it is from God.

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. He said, “Oh, foolish and slow of heart to believe.” That is not the same as “What’s the matter with you? Get on the program!” 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 always said: “Follow Me.”

The bad news is all around us. Christians of all people should not be surprised by this. But neither must we get taken in by 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 very best news of all is not Christ *was* risen or Christ *has* risen, as if you and I had missed it! The Gospel Good News is *Christ is Risen! Alleluia!*