

Easter Day Yr A, 16/04/2017
Ps 118:17, 24 & Matt 28:1-10
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“The dawning of a new day”

(Begin by singing, “This is the day that the LORD has made,” based on Ps 118).

The words of Psalm 118, although an integral part of the Jewish Passover celebration; when the Jewish people remember how God delivered them from Egyptian slavery; are also very appropriate words for us Christians as we celebrate how God delivered Jesus on that first Easter Day by raising him from death; and one day, promises to raise us from death too.

In today’s gospel, the opening verse tells us that: “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” Those words “the first day of the week was dawning,” I believe are pregnant with meaning, and give us a hint, a clue of what is about to happen next in the Easter story. Even today we speak with phrases like: “A new day is dawning,” or “It dawned on me/her/him/us/them.”

When we say things like “A new day is dawning, or “It dawned on me/her/him/us/them,” we may be speaking of surprise and discovery. Such language may describe those AHA! and EUREKA! experiences. We choose such language to refer to what is new and life changing. Examples of such language might refer to Copernicus’ discovery that the earth revolves around the sun; or inventions such as the automobile, the radio, television, and computer. All of these have changed life radically from times before these discoveries and inventions. The dawning of a new day opens up new opportunities in life; so too does the raising of Jesus from the dead. Christ’s resurrection has changed life radically for you and me, and for the whole human race. Now we know and trust in the discovery

of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary on that first Easter Sunday. Jesus is not dead in a tomb. No! Rather, he has been raised by God from the dead—rolling away our gravestones of scepticism, despair and doubt, and replacing them with the discovery of new hope and joy thanks to God’s powerful action of raising Jesus from the dead. Which again reminds us of the words of Psalm 118:24, which can be translated as follows: “This is the day that the LORD *has acted*; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

The women discovered that the place of death, the tomb, was not where they would find the dead Jesus. No! Rather, the angel invites them to come inside to see for themselves that the tomb is empty. Just as at some funerals the coffin is left open for people to view the dead body before the service begins to help them come to realize the person is dead by seeing for themselves—now everything in the Easter story is the opposite. After the women see for themselves Jesus is not dead inside the tomb; after they are on their mission to “go and tell” the disciples that Jesus was raised from the dead; Jesus surprised them by meeting and greeting them. Once they see the raised Jesus, and touch his feet, the women realized that he was alive and, filled with awe and joy went on to “go and tell” the disciples the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection.

God is able to transform death into life. The following story is a good illustration of this truth.

“What a great afternoon this is,” thought the young boy. “Grandpa and me fishing all by ourselves.” The two of them just talked and fished, and aimlessly drifted in a row-boat on a lake. The boy became restless—normal for a boy—and he leaned over the side to look into the water. There, just beneath the surface, a bunch of water beetles were flitting around as if they were playing.

Suddenly one of the water beetles crawled up on an oar. When it got halfway up, it attached the talons of its legs to the wooden oar and died. The boy’s curiosity was aroused and he interrupted his grandfather’s nap

to show him. They went back to fishing.

About three hours later, the boy looked down at the dead beetle. What he saw caused him to jump, almost tipping the boat. The beetle had dried up, and its shell started to crack open. Both the astonished grandfather and the boy watched silently at what unfolded before their eyes.

Something began to emerge from the opening: first long tentacles, then a head, then moist wings until, finally, a beautiful dragonfly fully emerged.

They both stared in awe. The dragonfly began to move its wings, slowly at first. Then it hovered gracefully over the water where the other water beetles were still flitting around. They didn't even recognize the dragonfly. They didn't realize that it was the same beetle they had played with some three hours earlier.

The boy took his finger and nudged the dried-out shell of the beetle. It was like an empty tomb.¹

As the boy and his grandfather made this discovery of a dead water beetle being transformed into a living, new dragonfly; so the women discovered a rolled away gravestone, an empty tomb, and a Jesus who had been dead on Good Friday, and now was very much alive. A new day dawned on that first Easter Sunday, and it was a new discovery that has changed the world ever since then. With the dawning of a new day, God raised Jesus from the dead. God defeated the powers of sin and evil. God acted to remove the gravestone of scepticism and despair—transforming them into hope and joy. A rolled away gravestone, an empty tomb, and a resurrected Jesus—all bear testimony to God's life-giving and life-saving power. The two Marys, having witnessed these things were filled with awe and great joy; they acted quickly and ran to "go and tell" the disciples the Good News.

The dawning of a new day thanks to God raising Jesus from death, and promising to do the same for us one day is why: In Tanzania when

Christians sing “Alleluia” on Easter morning, they literally laugh at the forces of evil conquered by Christ’s resurrection.

“Alleluia! HA! HA! HA!” they shout. “Alleluia! HA! HA! HA!”

That is the real message of Easter—that we can sing with joyous laughter on the day of Christ’s victory. For He has burst the bonds of death and by His resurrection has assured us the victory over Satan and death.²

So, on this day we too can, with awe and great joy, proclaim those wonderful words of the psalmist: “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. This is the day that the LORD has made, and that the LORD has acted; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” And let the people say: Amen! Hallelujah! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

1 Brian Cavanaugh, *More Sower’s Seeds: Second Planting* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 41-42.

2 *Sermon Illustrations For The Gospel Lessons* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1980, 1981, 1982), p. 17.