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## A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JESUS: AND THE BODY WAS GONE!

John 20:1-18

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This Easter story is one I will never tire of. Like rereading your favorite book, it is worth endless retelling – and even more so because it's true.

It offers us everything a great story does – the pain of loss and the tragedy of injustice coupled with fantastic power used to great purpose snatching victory from the jaws of certain defeat. What sets this story apart from other stories of redemption is its reach.

Other great narratives might be heroic triumph for a few dozen, or even a few hundred, and maybe, on truly exceptional occasions, a few thousand. But the Easter story offers victory and redemption on a cosmic scale that traverses all creation, moving through space and time for eternity, offering everyone the gift of a glorious, joyous life – and this means you.

Now we truly know what John means when he said, "God so loved the world!" Now we know why Jesus came. And it was not simply to add to the length of our existence by giving us everlasting life, but to let us share in the greatest love of all time.

During this past Lenten season, we have seen the tender moments when Jesus looked to his Heavenly Father for support and God spoke to the Son with beaming pride. It is this love, the love that the two of them share, that we are welcomed into.

Jesus' sacrifice has literally joined us to the Holy family of God the Spirit, God the Son, and God the Father. We have been adopted by God!

It is the story of *Annie* on a global scale – only this time Annie is every one of us and Daddy Warbucks is God.

But you know all of this already, right? And we still spend much of our life missing it. Like Mary, when resurrection first happens, we don't often recognize it. Jesus was literally staring her in the

face, the resurrection was one foot from her and, still, she could not see it.

In our life of distraction and busyness we miss it all the time. But, as disciples, we live by faith and not by sight. Mary didn't believe with her eyes and yet John believed, not by what he saw but by what he did not see. When he looked into the tomb the body was gone.

A few years back, when the devastating tsunami struck the shores of India (amongst other places), we heard a story of a group of people – the Moken – who live off the land and sea, the way their ancestors have for thousands of years. The Moken, were out on the water that day, recognized the signs of the upcoming tsunami and rowed to safety.

They did not spot a massive wave and head for the hills, instead, they noticed rolling waves in the midst of the ocean that barely disturbed their boats. You and I would have ignored it, but they knew it for what it was. They also knew there was no time to row to shore and head for the hills. So, they went the exact opposite direction instinct would dictate.

They rowed for deeper waters. In those deeper waters, the tsunami could not build to sufficient height and power to threaten them. All the Moken people survived that day.

When life strikes, we, like Mary, want to shrink from our faith and console ourselves with fond memories and let go of our trust. But the Moken went deeper. You and I, in the face of the resurrection, can meet any tsunamis that life brings, rowing deeper in our faith in God and the power Christ holds of life over death.

But, it won't be by sight but by faith. The Moken did not see the tsunami; they only saw the signs.

John did not see Jesus, he only saw the burial clothes lying by themselves.

As I reread this story I realized, perhaps for the first time, that no one actually saw the moment the resurrection happened.

From the Gospels, we are witnesses to the death, in all its agony – from the trial, to the crown of thorns, to the nailing, to the spear piercing his side, to the last gasp of life. But there was no one there to see Jesus came back to life. In the greatest moment in history, we arrive on the scene after the fact.

If a Hollywood director were to write this script, we would hear God's booming voice like the sound of thunder echoing down from the heavens declaring. "Son, Sleeper AWAKE!" We would see the gates of Hell burst open as Jesus is ripped from the Netherworld, the ground would shake, the stone blocking the tomb would shatter into pieces, and Jesus' eyes would pop open. It would make a fantastic story.

But alas, it's not in there. No one saw the resurrection because no one was meant to.

Death we know. Death we can see. Jesus' death, and that of others, is something that happens daily. But new life, resurrected life, is more mysterious and intangible. Hard to get your fingers on, but no less real because of it.

Occasionally after a rain shower, there is a gossamer web that glistens in the light outside our front door. The outline of the web is accentuated by the hundreds of miniscule water drops hanging from the spider's web, each glowing with a tiny rainbow. It is simply radiant. But unfortunately, it blocks our path to the driveway. When I try to relocate it to another branch, I inevitably destroy it.

The resurrected Jesus (if you read further in this story) was exactly like that gossamer web. Here one minute talking with the women, poof! the next moment he was with the disciples, poof! and in another moment, he is walking through locked doors.

The resurrected Jesus disappears if we grasp too tightly, looking for proof and hard evidence. He is illusive and must be held onto like one holds a baby chick.

He must be held onto by faith and not by sight. For it is faith and hope and love, things of the heart and soul, that define him and that, in turn, will change this life into an eternal one. So, let us not hope for the impossible, but the divine.

To witness the actual resurrection would keep us looking in the wrong places for God's glory;  
because it's not found in the glitz and the glamour of this world;  
nor can it be found in power and politics;  
you cannot buy it in the store;  
you cannot withdraw it from a bank;  
you cannot grow it in a garden and preserve it in a jar;  
you cannot keep it for yourself under lock and key;  
it doesn't have a handle that you can grasp with your hand.

Mary did not see it although Jesus was staring her in the face. But when she heard his voice, it opened her heart.

But there are flashes of insight;  
it's not a spectacle for the eyes but a mystery for the mind;  
it's not a soundtrack in your ears but a heartbeat in your soul;  
it is a kernel, a kernel of it everywhere you go,  
the smallest seed that can grow hope that takes over the world.

I heard it in the cords of guitars and the beat of drums in a humble fellowship hall in Cuba;  
you have felt it when a little baby grasps on to your finger,  
you have known it in the beaming smile of a child,  
you have seen it when a rainbow bursts through the clouds in iridescent splendor.

Jesus Christ has risen! Row for deeper waters and, with faith, it will be with you wherever you go!