

In Luke's telling of the Easter story, the women do not see the resurrected Jesus. And yet they are the first apostles, carrying at least the beginnings of the Good News to the rest of the disciples and starting the chain of transmission to you and me today.

They go to the tomb of Jesus with no expectations, nothing you would call hope, except the knowledge that it is good to tend to the body of someone who has died. It's a thin thread on which to hang a resurrection story, but it's more than the other disciples supply us; they're still asleep back at the house, hibernating to dull the pain of the recent days' trauma. The women could be seen as being somewhat open to comfort, in the sense that getting up and out of the house to do one's duty signals readiness to go on with life. So there they are, spices and ointments in hand, but the stone has been rolled away from the entrance and the body is not in the tomb. Suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stand beside them and say to the terrified women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." And they remind the women of Jesus' earlier predictions, which nobody had understood, of his death and resurrection. The angels' words construct a connection between what the women have experienced in the last few days and the hope of the kingdom of God that they'd gotten from Jesus. It seems important—worth telling the other disciples—and so they do. Peter is the only one who goes to see the tomb. There's a whole nother node of the fractal of this story—Peter, who had disqualified himself from discipleship by denying Jesus, is the only one who has some shred of hope that impels him to investigate the women's story—but that'll have to be for another time. What I'm saying here is that when they hear the angels, the women begin to discern a connection between the horrible today and the wonderful last month. They don't understand the mystery, but they begin to be able to enter into it by reframing the last few

days in terms of things Jesus had said earlier that hadn't made sense. And that is how we enter into mystery too.

The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have produced a book called *The Book of Joy*. They are spiritual leaders from different traditions who have undergone profound suffering and who are also known for being joyful. For this book, they spent a week together in conversation, with questions and prompts from their co-author Douglas Abrams. It's well worth the read, and I'm just picking out some parts of it. They talk a lot about the importance of reframing one's experiences.

Tutu says, "Hope is different [from optimism] in that it is based not on the ephemerality of feelings but on the firm ground of conviction. I believe with a steadfast faith that there can never be a situation that is utterly, totally hopeless. Hope is deeper and very, very close to unshakable. It's in the pit of your tummy. It's not in your head. It's all here," he said, pointing to his abdomen.

He refers to the assassination of a critical leader in the anti-apartheid movement, which happened at a very delicate point in negotiations. The negotiations could have collapsed, but Nelson Mandela was able to prevent collapse by addressing the nation. "Now, if you had been an optimist, you would have said, Well, the assassination of Chris Hani is really the end of everything. What made people want to go on going on—holding on by the skin of their teeth—was not optimism but hope—dogged, inextinguishable hope."

So what does that look like when it's at home, this hope? Here's one example, from a woman whose husband had dementia and was in memory care. They had been married for 60 years, and watching him fail was very painful. One day she realized that he did not know who she was. She said to him, "You don't recognize me, do you?" (which is a terrible thing to say to a person with dementia by the way, but you'll see her wisdom in a second). He admitted that

he didn't, and she said, "Well, I'm your wife and you always do what I tell you to do, so now you have to sit up and eat your lunch!" He didn't remember his wife, but he had sort of a muscle memory of that kind of humor, so he laughed, and the quality of their relationship continued. In *The Book of Joy* the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu say that jokes are funny—and thus powerful—precisely because they break our expectations and help us to accept the unexpected. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" sounds a little bit mocking to me, but actually I think it's exactly that holy humor that breaks expectations.

Another reframing is shared by Edith Eva Eger, a Holocaust survivor and psychologist who specializes in treating post-traumatic stress syndrome. She tells of visiting two soldiers on the same day at an army hospital. Both were paraplegics who had lost the use of their legs in combat. They had the same diagnosis and the same prognosis. The first veteran was lying on his bed in a fetal position, railing against life and decrying his fate. The second was out of bed in his wheelchair, say that he felt as if he had been given a second chance in life. As he was wheeled through the garden, he had realized that he was closer to the flowers and could look right into his children's eyes.

But is this simply being Pollyanna? Are we seeing the world less clearly when we view it through these rose-colored glasses? I do not think anyone would accuse the Dalai Lama or Archbishop Tutu of not seeing the struggles they have faced or the horrors of our world with keen and unflinching vision. What they are reminding us is that often what we think is reality is only part of the picture. We look at one of the calamities in our world, as the Archbishop suggested, and then we look again, and we see all those who are helping to heal those who have been harmed. This is the ability to reframe life more positively based on a broader, richer, more nuanced perspective. (p. 158)

The Book of Joy contains many powerful stories of reframing. The Dalai Lama tells of his physician who spent years in the Chinese gulag being "re-educated." He thought of it as an

opportunity to practice patience and compassion, which I'm sure it was, and also reminded himself of one of the core Buddhist principles, which is that impermanence defines existence. Nothing lasts forever. So as he was forbidden to say Buddhist prayers and use his rosary, he read Chairman Mao's Little Red Book and used the syllables of the words as rosary beads right under the eyes of the guards. "When you are imprisoned, as you said, it's normal to experience great difficulties. But these experiences can, with the right way of thinking, lead you to have great inner strength. So I think that this is something very useful, particularly when we're passing through difficulties." p. 128

It reminds me of the teaching in *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem, who writes about racialized trauma and how to mend our hearts and bodies. He talks about dirty pain—which is going through hardship with avoidance, blame and denial—and clean pain—which is facing your pain, experiencing it fully, moving through it, and building your capacity for further growth. There's a lot to what he says, but what I want to pull out of it for today is that simple insight that there's dirty pain and there's clean pain, and clean pain is what I think Tutu and the Dalai Lama are teaching us. We can "pass through difficulties," as the Dalai Lama says, and *not* come out more damaged, but in fact come out more resilient, more compassionate, more grounded.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The angel's words suggest to the women that their experience means something other than what they'd thought. The angels do not rationalize, or explain the grief away, or magically make everything better, but their question causes the women to metabolize their trauma into a gift. And that's all it takes. There is no risen Christ in this story, no direct experience of resurrection. There is just the hope-based joke

of seeking the living among the dead, and the pieces suddenly fall into place in a whole new way. Do we celebrate the resurrection, do we have hope, because we have seen the risen Christ? We do not. But we testify to the resurrection because we have seen the reality that hope reveals. We have received from others a testimony that made all the pieces fall into place, and therefore we join the great cloud of witnesses with our testimonies.

Let me close with a meditation by Nigel Vandell:

Sometimes it doesn't work out as you expect.
Sometimes even though you know
the game is up,
even though you know
the inevitable outcome,

even sometimes when you have given up
yourself...
...it doesn't work out as you expect.

There are those days when the child,
who has been running away for years,
every week, without fail,
...doesn't.

The day when the disabled child,
is finally accepted for who they are.
When the traveller,
for so long the outsider,
suddenly becomes a friend.

There are those days when,
in the face of despair,
for some unexpected and
incomprehensible reason,
our long dead hopes
are brought back to life.

There are those days
we suddenly realize
the stone has been moved...
... and the tomb is empty.
Let us pray:

Risen, ruling Lord,
All glory, honor, and praise be yours.
You make all things new,
Constantly creating beauty from ashes,
And pouring out gladness, all gladness – grace.

We praise you
That Calvary's victory is proved again a
thousand times each day
In glimpses, miracles and reconciliations,
Even as we wait for an end to the good fight
And strive to have faith for long dead hopes
To burst to life as you promised.
May your kingdom come in its fullness, your will
be done
On earth as in heaven, our risen beloved Savior.

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