

To begin with, the women had very little to go on. Just an empty tomb and the words of two strange men. They had just had an unnecessary tutorial on the cruelty of real life, with the arrest and execution of Jesus. But they'd already known how arbitrary and unforgiving life can be; it was lived experience for ordinary people in first-century Palestine. It had still been that kind of world when they traveled with Jesus: his feet got dirty too, and friends bickered and sniped at each other, and they all probably missed meals sometimes. So on the morning after the Sabbath, all the women wanted or expected to do was to give his corpse some TLC, some small honor. When they found the tomb empty, the most likely explanation was that someone had maliciously stolen the body and deprived them of even this small consolation. And then the men appeared and said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." Yeah, maybe.

They ran and told the other disciples, who were also well-grounded in the real world, and it seemed to them an idle tale, a collective hallucination by upset women. But Peter did go check; all he saw was linen cloths, and he went home "amazed." That is all we get from Luke on Easter morning. Peter went home amazed. And I love that, because it's so true: often resurrection happens, and we don't see it right away. Resurrection happens, but we don't always see it right away. Shoot, it took the disciples till Pentecost, really, to get it.

We have scripts in our heads for what is supposed to happen, and when the script isn't fulfilled, we are disappointed. Jesus' followers' script was that he should have taken over Jerusalem and the Temple, as the new King David. Fail. Once he'd been killed, their script said that they should get the small comfort of anointing his

body for burial. It didn't go that way that time either. Those of us whose children have grown up sometimes see the script tossed aside and, speaking for myself, it's with fear and trembling. The script says that kids grow up, they find their intellectual passion in college, they graduate and get a job in that very field, and they *just love it*. They couldn't be happier. *My* experience is that they have a rich but also intense and trying time in college, flounder around wondering what to major in, graduate, grieve the loss of the friend-rich college environment, search for jobs, feel lonely, wonder if they're too fat, make unsettling revelations about themselves to their parents, flounder some more, get jobs not in their field (whatever "their field" is), and slowly, unsteadily, lurchingly, begin to find their place in the world.. This is hard to explain to the grandparents, who want to hear that the loves of their lives are thriving and on their way to international acclaim and the Nobel Prize. But eventually, miraculously, these adult children discover jobs they could not have known existed, had they not lurched into them on their way to something else, by accident, and they get those jobs, and remarkable things ensue.

Kristin Tennant, a blogger on spiritual matters, says that she often finds herself steering or trying to predict the way God will bring about redemption. When her marriage was in trouble and they had been in counseling for a few years without success, her husband got a job opportunity in a new state. It meant leaving behind her church, her friends, and her job, but she sensed that God wanted her to let go of those things so that her husband could have a job that made him happier, and when he was happier, the marriage would work better, and she'd be happier. God wanted to save their marriage.

So she went, and it didn't work, and they got divorced. "Within two years of moving, our marriage ended. I was left feeling like God was some great movie director who had put the plot in motion and then abandoned the story at the most critical moment. Not only was my marriage not saved, but I had given up everything else I loved in the process of 'trusting God.' This isn't how the story was supposed to end."

More recently, her church lost a member to alcoholism. This was a man who had lived on the streets because of his disease. They had bought him a camp chair with arms so that when he fell asleep in church he wouldn't fall out of his seat. She saw the chair as a symbol of the way God accepts us right where we are, and when a local nonprofit set up an apartment for this man to live in, she was sure he was getting a new lease on life. "'This is going to be a great one,' I said to God, full of admiration." And then he went back on the streets with his addiction, and then he was found unconscious with a head wound, and then he died. *Not* in the script.

Tennant says,

When it came to Vernon, I didn't want to accept that redemption and healing might look like Vernon's empty camp chair sitting in our sanctuary. I wanted it to look like Vernon sitting in that chair each Sunday, all cleaned up—his hair combed, his eyes bright, no alcohol ravaging his body and mind. I wanted the story to be about Vernon hosting a Bible study in his home, working as a cook at a local restaurant, building relationships with his nephews.

When it came to my marriage, I couldn't grasp that there was all kinds of room for wholeness and healing after divorce. As the door closed on my marriage, I felt like the door was also closing on any possibility of redemption. I thought there was just one path, one possibility, and it had passed.

But I am here to attest to the fact that God is so much bigger than our understanding of Him. He is also so much bigger than any mess we can create

in this broken world.

And I am here to say that our job, when it comes to redemption stories, is not to steer or predict them but to believe in the sheer power and possibility of them. It is to openly expect, with great joy and hope, that any inconceivable plot twist might indeed occur and that even the wildest of outcomes can be infused with God's great love and redemption in this story that never really ends.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" the two men ask the women at the tomb. They weren't looking for the living; they were looking for their dead rabbi, and this is where they had seen him last. It would have been a comfort to anoint his body. What they did not expect, and could not take in for many weeks, was that he was alive and among the living. That had not been in the script, and was too strange to react to. But that's what God does, throw away the script and do what we could not have imagined. If you don't find the resurrection a little hard to believe, you're just not taking it seriously enough.

Thank goodness, God does not depend on our imaginations for what is possible. Plenty of tragedy and rottenness take place in this world, heaven knows. And yet against all odds, tragedy does not rule and it does not end our stories. Kristin Tennant got remarried. Death could not separate her alcoholic church member from God, only from the rest of the church. Our children find graces that we did not provide or even anticipate for them. Jesus' disciples discovered that the kingdom of God *was* at hand, just as he had said, and what's more, they showed it to other people who had absolutely no reason to buy a story like that, but who bought it because they could see the power of resurrection in those disciples' lives.

No need to do anything else today: just be amazed. Just hold that awe and

amazement. Jesus is risen, and our story has a new chapter.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Glory be to you, whom death could not defeat.

Praise to the savior of heaven and earth. Honor and glory are yours, now and forever, Christ our savior and redeemer. Amen.