

RESURRECTION is GOD ACTING NOW



Luke 24:1-12 On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that we read the resurrection story of Luke 24:1-12 as the culmination of Jesus's life and death and as God's continuing acting in all of creation.

At the beginning of March many of us in Australia and New Zealand were grappling with the death of Denis Edwards, outstanding eco-theologian in our region and internationally. A priest of the Adelaide Archdiocese, South Australia, Denis was captured by the question of *how God acts* (the title of one of his books) in an evolving universe. Having spent his life questioning how we might understand the Christian tradition in an evolving universe and amid complex eco-systems, Denis now knows the profound experience of this reality at the heart of life in a new way.

In *How God Acts*, Denis describes resurrection as "an unimaginable and amazing act of God in our history . . . a promise that human beings and with them the whole creation will be transfigured in Christ." He goes on to say that resurrection "contains a claim that the final transformation of all things has already begun in Jesus and is at work in the universe." Elsewhere, he says that

"resurrection is not only the culmination of the life and death of Jesus, but also the inner meaning of creation." He makes this very explicit when he says that "resurrection is the central expression in our history of the self-giving love of God who is present in every ancient oak tree, every ant, and every kangaroo, closer than they are to themselves, as the source of their being and the enabler of their action." He invites us through the enduring quality of his words to encounter this "self-giving love of God" not only in ancient oak but also majestic kauri; in kangaroo and kiwi. God is appealing to us through Denis's life and work to discover anew how God acts.

"The God of resurrection is the God who is present, in the life-giving Spirit, in the events of the big bang, in the stars which lit up the early universe, in the first bacterial life on Earth, in the lives of the first human beings in the history of Israel, and in the life and death of Jesus."

At Easter time each year, we seek to "discover anew how God acts". In this, we turn to our sacred texts, the scriptures and their story-ing of Jesus's journey through life, death, and resurrection. Our growing ecological consciousness also turns our attention to Earth and Earth's story as it interacts with the Jesus story. In this short article I seek to listen to each of these stories and their profound interrelationship in the text of Luke 24:1-12 as they reveal a little more clearly for us the God who acts.

As with most stories, the account of Easter morning in the Gospel of Luke grounds what is recounted in time and place.

It is the first day of the week and at the first sign of dawn. These details are not mere props in the story. They invite us to attend to time that both locates each happening and alerts us to its potential: the *first* day of the week and the *first* sign of dawn. Interdependent with time is place – the women go to the tomb – and it is in this time and this place peopled with the materiality of human bodies and fragrant with the spices that the women had prepared, that resurrection will be experienced.


The materiality permeating the narrative engages us as readers as the narrator informs us that the stone, the cover to the entrance to the tomb has been rolled back. The earthen tomb that had received the body of Jesus who had been crucified is revealed. But, the text says pointedly, the material body of Jesus was not there. The words of the two figures who appear to the women provide an explanation: "He has been raised" (Lk 24:5).

How might we understand this resurrection of Jesus from an ecological perspective? Denis Edwards can help us. He says that in "Jesus's act of self-giving in death, he falls into the arms of God and is raised up and transformed in the life-giving spirit . . . In the paschal event, part of evolutionary history gives itself completely into God." Denis tells us: "The God of resurrection is the God who is present, in the life-giving Spirit, in the events of the big bang, in the stars which lit up the early universe, in the first bacterial life on Earth, in the lives of the first human beings in the history of Israel, and in the life and death of Jesus."

As we read/hear the Lucan text this Easter, we are

invited to encounter the "God of resurrection". This may occur as we hear the words of the ones in dazzling apparel: "Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here but has been raised" (Lk 24:5). But for those of us who seek to hear these words in a world understood from an evolutionary perspective, there needs to be an expansion of our consciousness.

The final verses of Luke 24:1-12 remind us that this extraordinary expansion of consciousness occurs in a world marred by limitations and injustice. For instance, the testimony of the women is not believed by the male disciples, even though three of them are specifically named which indicates their significance in the community. Peter quietly confirms "what had happened", providing a conclusion to the obvious gendering of the narrative.

When we return to the heart of the story, Jesus has been raised. We each spend our life-time engaging with this reality. Our growing ecological consciousness is inviting us, as it invited Denis Edwards, to allow the call of the universe to lead us along new pathways for interpreting and understanding the God who acts in ways beyond our imagining. 

Painting: *Mary Magdalene Discovering the Empty Tomb* by Herschel Pollard © Used with permission www.pollardgallery.com



Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.



the
Lent
appeal
2019

 **Caritas**
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

The Catholic Agency for Justice,
Peace & Development

**LIVING OUR LIVES
WITH LOVE**

Gaudete et Exsultate, Pope Francis

0800 22 10 22

www.caritas.org.nz