

Reflection on the Gospel-Easter Year C
(Easter Vigil Luke 24:1-12; Easter Sunday John 20:1-9)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

It does not always pay to discount someone's story just because it sounds a bit fantastic. In Luke's resurrection account, that's what the "eleven and all the rest" do with the women's stories of a rolled-back stone, no body, and heavenly interpreters. The notion of resurrection was not in itself extraordinary in a first century Jewish context. The Pharisees believed in a general resurrection, but the idea that God would raise one person from the dead before the time of the general resurrection was quite unthinkable. From the men's perspective, therefore, the women are talking nonsense. Peter decides to go and confirm their testimony, indicating that he suspects there is some truth in what they have to say. Their account checks out and he goes away in amazement (no apology, just amazement).

This gospel and the whole Easter celebration is about "the one who lives". Luke's account leaves no doubt about the death of Jesus: there are witnesses, there is evidence. The same goes for the burial. Now, in the story of the empty tomb, Luke wants to assert that Jesus is alive. The women (Mary of Magdala, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Mary the mother of James and unidentified others) are confronted with the question: "Why are you seeking among the dead the one who lives?" They are then entrusted with the message of resurrection: "He is not here, but has been raised." They are invited to remember the prophetic words of Jesus. They do indeed remember and they return to proclaim the good news. In line with countless prophetic figures before and since, their testimony is rejected, but is nonetheless effective through the telling and retelling of the story.

We turn briefly to the reading from John's gospel for Easter Sunday morning. Mention of "the first day of the week while it was still dark" evokes the first day of creation and God's word bringing light. The two angels guarding the tomb call to mind the heavenly creatures who barred the way to the tree of life in the Genesis garden story. The biblical story has come full circle, from creation to resurrection and new creation.

We take time at Easter to re-member, re-enact, and re-tell these originating stories of our tradition, to dramatise and celebrate in solemn ritual what we celebrate in lower key every Sunday of the year. In our liturgical re-telling, all the power of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is present to us and to our world. Resurrection faith is a commitment to life. In these times of planetary uncertainty, a commitment to life includes taking seriously the findings of reputable climate change scientists who no doubt sometimes feel a bit like the women of the gospel whose message was discounted. Resurrection faith invites us to live simply so that all may simply live.