

[K Karpen] Please rise to hear the Gospel:

[Emily Peck] On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about that, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men spoke to them:

[K Karpen] Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.

[Emily Peck] Then they remembered his words and returning from the tomb they told all of this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who had told this to the apostles.

[K Karpen] But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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.

[Emily Peck] This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

[K Karpen] Please be seated.

Emily, the thing that seems strangest to me about Luke's Easter story is the appearance of the two 'men.' I wonder who we are supposed to think they are. Are they angels? Maybe the women don't believe in angels. Maybe they have no reason to. In any case, something about the two really seems to freak the women out. Maybe because they appear so suddenly. What do you think?

[Emily Peck] Well of course they're startled! But that's a good point, K, wondering about the identity of these two men. Honestly I've never asked who they were: I've just assumed they were angels. So if they are - or if they aren't - what does it mean? What do they mean? If the women are startled by these two (which they seem to be), then why listen to them? Why believe them? If I were walking in Central Park with a female friend at an odd hour of the day and two men appeared to us with cryptic messages, I'd probably get away as fast as possible and would certainly not give credence to what they're saying.

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[K Karpen] I don't blame you. And remember, they're walking through a cemetery! Into a tomb!

[Emily Peck] These women have been seeing a lot of incredible things through their time with Jesus, I bet. Did that prepare them for believing these strange men?

[K Karpen] Maybe. What's a couple more strange men after all they've been through! But they do seem afraid. I guess they really aren't expecting to see anyone at the tomb. At least anyone alive.

[Emily Peck] That's interesting, too; since they are expecting death but they see two men who are alive. And the one person they expect to see dead they don't see at all. And Jesus doesn't actually appear in this version of the story. He doesn't reveal his risen self to them at all. He's just not there. They expect him, but he's not there!

[K Karpen] They expect to see a body wrapped up in sheets. All wrapped up in linen cloths. The cloths are there, but the body's not! Everything is different than they expect. The last thing they expect is the resurrection. It's all mixed up!

[Emily Peck] Luke is full of the language of mixing things up - high places made low and low places made high. Poor being made rich and rich being kept out of the kingdom of Heaven when they are in charge of the kingdom on earth. And here, death doesn't work. That phrase about nothing in life being certain except death and taxes was true then, too. What does that leave to be certain about?

[K Karpen] Just taxes, I guess.

[Emily Peck] I guess if nothing is certain then the person who proved all those certainties to be false should be listened to - Jesus is the new expert on a new reality. It is truly a brand new day. What does it look like when the whole world and all you think is true has been changed?

[K Karpen] I guess it looks like life--but maybe real life, new life, a different life.

[Emily Peck] I think of that "dazzling" word that is used about the men's clothing. Of course, we get dazzled by things all the time - just look at Times Square! Look at the Oscar red carpet! But what if we opened our eyes one morning, this morning, Easter morning, and saw everything as new. Completely new. How could it be anything other than dazzling; in a really pure sense, a really complete sense?

[K Karpen] I like that. Luke is telling us, through the experience of these three or four or five women who come to the tomb, that life lived in this world of resurrection

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really is different--if we open our eyes and see it as different--as dazzling. Dazzling in the sense of too amazing and beautiful and powerful to even look at. If we saw things like that, we too would be 'bowing our faces to the ground' like these women. But we are busy looking around dark, empty tombs and all kinds of dark, empty places and mistaking them for places of life.

[Emily Peck] Maybe it's not even about mistaking them for places of life - maybe it's about expectations. If we expect death and get death, aren't we protecting ourselves? We're prepared, we can handle it. Although sometimes we can't. I remember going to the hospital and seeing my grandfather right before he died. I had been prepped and knew what to expect, but I still wasn't prepared!

[K Karpen] Of course not.

[Emily Peck] I have to imagine that on their walk to the tomb - maybe they are grumbling about how early in the morning they had to wake up, or reminiscing about their travels with Jesus - I have to believe that they are also trying to prepare each other and themselves for seeing the body of Jesus. Maybe the women think if they talk about it enough, think about it enough, say "Jesus" and "dead" in the same sentence enough, that they'll get it. When I went to visit Chief, that's what we called my grandfather, in the hospital, all I could think was, "Those legs will never support him again." No matter how much preparation I'd done with the rest of my family, I wasn't prepared to see that. Even when expecting death, going to places of death, can we ever really be prepared - or protected? What if when protecting ourselves from death, we also protect ourselves from the surprises, the unexpected? What if we protect ourselves from life? Looking around dark, empty tombs is sometimes what we feel like our life is all about.

[K Karpen] The last thing we expect is resurrection.

[Emily Peck] And sometimes that's the reality: we can look around us and see all kinds of things that are wrong with the world. But what if there is still room for miracles in those dark, empty places? How does that change things for us? What happens when a tomb becomes a place of life?! That's resurrection.

[K Karpen] That's resurrection.

[Emily Peck] Leaving room for the unbelievable, the unexpected, the unimaginable. I know we so often run the risk of metaphorizing the resurrection so much that it loses its meaning.

[K Karpen] Metaphorizing?

[Emily Peck] Pretending it's just a symbol of something. But what if it's the truth? What if it's real? What if we really can suspend our disbelief, and leave behind our expectations; leave behind our doubts about the possibility of the resurrection? Let's start with the easy facts the way Luke gives them to us: Fact, a tomb is where dead bodies are. Fact, the women came. Fact, the death they were looking for wasn't there. They didn't exactly see life - but they saw the greeting of life or the words of life or a pathway for life or something...

[K Karpen] They saw something they couldn't see.

[Emily Peck] Exactly!

[K Karpen] Because they saw something that was dazzling in the most profound and amazing sense.

[Emily Peck] And it changes everything they think about being alive.

[K Karpen] I can't help thinking of the Terry Schiavo situation. Whatever anyone may think about it, it confronts us with the intensely personal issue of what it means to be alive. Everything about it just breaks my heart. But, in Christian perspective, I wonder: would inserting a feeding tube keep her *in* life, or keep her *from* life? From the next part of her life. My dad has a feeding tube; it's keeping him alive. For now, he's ok with it. But I know there's going to come a time when he just says, or wants to say, "Enough! That's really enough! I'm ready to move on." And I think that's going to be a lot harder for us than it'll be for him. It is all such a disturbing situation, because it makes us think harder than we want to about just what life is, and what it isn't.

[Emily Peck] I couldn't help thinking about Terry Schiavo and her family, either, you're absolutely right. This is the most press-covered story in our country right now; and it's all about being between life and death and being faced with the most difficult decision any person would have to make about the care of a loved one. It seems to be that regardless of our questions about this particular case, it raises the idea that as faithful people, people who are part of the resurrected body of Christ, we are charged with the task of bringing life into situations of death in all sorts of ways. We are called to be pathways of life into the world of death that surrounds us. We are called to walk on those pathways and walk with others on those pathways. Pathways of life--real life, eternal life.

[K Karpen] And eternal life starts in this life. Eternal life is about quality of life, not quantity of life. I was thinking about all this the other day when you and I were

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working downstairs in the food pantry. I wish Terry well, but all the discussion about reinserting her feeding tube makes me think of all the real, concrete ways we cut off life-sustaining food to people. Without a second thought! What if Congress rushed back into emergency session to restore the cuts to emergency food programs? And let's be serious: There are millions of people without health insurance who couldn't get a feeding tube if their lives depended on it. What if Christian groups around the country held vigils until every American had access to health care? Praying out on the streets with signs and placards and candles. It's hard to picture that in the world we live in. But in a resurrected world?

[Emily Peck] In a resurrected world we can be those pathways of life! We can expect resurrection. We can feed the hungry and clothe the naked and take care of the helpless. In the midst of budget shortages and oppressive and unfeeling institutions, we can bring life. The women had a good excuse when they went to the tomb expecting death - this resurrection thing was completely new. We don't have that excuse. They've told us that miraculous story and now we can live it! We can expect the resurrection!

We can expect the resurrection when we look at the world in all its pain and hunger and suffering and violence. We can expect the resurrection when we look at our health care system. We can expect the resurrection when we look at the Sudan and when we sit by the hospital beds of people we love.

[K Karpen] We Christians need to rethink radically what it might mean--really mean--to be pro-life, in light of the resurrection. If we live expecting the resurrection, we can't look at only one part of life. We need to respect life in its fullness and completeness. That would mean a whole new look at medical ethics. That would mean a whole new social policy. That would mean a whole new foreign policy, God knows.

[Emily Peck] The thing that gets me at the end of this passage and at the end of this conversation is that we still have to think about the pain of living in a place where death is expected. At the end of the Gospel lesson, the women tell the other disciples about their encounter and that Jesus has risen. Peter doesn't believe them and has to run to the tomb to see for himself. He's been given what we've been given - the promise fulfilled, the Christ resurrection. And the first thing he does is run back to the tomb, back to the place of death. My guess is that he does so in doubt - or maybe just fear of believing.

After this church service we'll leave this sanctuary. We'll go out onto the sidewalk and we'll face the day - the day of resurrection. And just like every other day, we'll get onto the subway or bus. We'll hear the same sounds we heard yesterday, the day

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before the resurrection. We are all about to run back to the place of death. Only this time we walk out of that door with an amazing choice. Yes, we've been given that choice before. Every year we relive the forty days of Lent, the triumph of Palm Sunday, the remembrance of Maundy Thursday and the darkness of Good Friday. But maybe this year will be different.

This year I pray that we can leave the doors of this sanctuary and enter the world of death—but enter it on Jesus' pathways of life. This year I pray that when we tell others that they also can expect the resurrection, they won't go running to places of death just to be sure. This year when we step out, we will step out on pathways and as pathways. As people who do expect the resurrection, we will find an abundance of life. We will be dazzled. We will be dazzling!

[K Karpen] You're starting with that blazer.

[Emily Peck] Thanks! That's quite a shirt.

[K Karpen] Thank you. That reminds me of watching my daughter Jessie in front of the mirror the other day. She was looking and looking. And moving and smiling, alone in her thoughts... I have no idea what she was thinking but she was clearly pleased! She saw herself! And she was dazzled. And she was dazzling!

But we *are* dazzling! That's part of the message of Easter. We are so incredibly dazzling. The way God sees us, the way we look to God? Dazzling. You are dazzling. Not just cause you dressed up for Easter. Look around! I can barely look at you! You're dazzling!

I feel as though I spend a lot of my life wrapped up in a shroud. Wrapped up in a sheet. I'm not just trying to be dramatic here. Think about it. I'm sitting like this. I'm standing like this. I'm walking along the street like this. It's safe. I feel protected.

But it makes it a little hard to embrace life. It makes it a little hard to expect the resurrection! See, I don't have linens wrapped around me; I just act like I do.

But what if I really thought the resurrection was about me?! What if I really thought the resurrection could change how I walk through my life? What if I believe you, Emily? What if I believe that I'm a pathway of life for somebody?

I wouldn't sit that way. I wouldn't stand like that. I wouldn't walk like that.
I'd stand like this! I'd walk like this!
I'd be embracing life!
I'd be expecting the resurrection!

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I'd walk around shouting, Hey, I expect the resurrection!
I expect the resurrection!

Repeat that with me so I don't feel like an idiot:
I expect the resurrection!

I expect the resurrection for kids in Darfur who've spent their whole lives running. I
expect the resurrection!

I expect the resurrection for families without emergency food.
I expect the resurrection!

I expect the resurrection for the millions of people who couldn't get a feeding tube if
their lives depended on it. I expect the resurrection!

And I expect the resurrection in my life. In my pitiful, shrouded life.
I expect the resurrection!

And in your life!
Expect the resurrection!

Alleluia!

(Heleluyan)