

Easter 2017
St. Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

January 1, 1963.

That was the date that I was supposed to be born.

So my parents were excited as they got the nursery ready for the arrival of their first child.

January 1st came... and went.

January 10th came, and went.

Finally on January 20th, my mother went into labor at Valley Forge Army Hospital. And she was in labor for 20 hours. Without drugs.

My dad was in the Army, so he could not be there for my birth.

My mom's parents were with her during the day, but since labor was lasting so long, went home to get some sleep.

So mom was all alone that night, in the middle of 20 hours of labor. With no drugs....

Years later, my mom told me that childbirth was the most frightening and painful thing she ever experienced. And she told me that she had never been so happy.

Well, after 20 hours of labor, on January 21, 1963 I was born. Their first child. I weighed 10 pounds, 6 ounces.....

My head was so large that my skull kind of came to a point. My dad said I looked like 'the original cone head.'

I had a bruise around my right eye. Dad said that I looked like Pete the Dog from the Little Rascals.

Grandmom Renninger came to see me. I was her 17th grandchild. She took one look at this cone-headed, bruised baby and said, "well, maybe he'll get cuter."

Nanny Woods arrived. I was her first grandchild. She looked at me and declared, “He is the most beautiful child ever born.”

I always trusted Nanny’s opinion more!

Isn’t it interesting how two women can look at the same baby, and draw a very different conclusion? Two people can watch the same movie, look at the same piece of art, view the same situation, and *see* it in very different ways.

It’s all a matter of perspective. Our perspective is shaped by who we are, how we grew up, what our life experience has been. Sometimes we see life in a certain way because of attitudes we learned when we were kids. And sometimes our perspective changes radically because of a life-changing event.

The men and women who first followed Jesus were a rag tag group. Most of them were Jewish. Some were more educated than others. Some were fishermen, carpenters, political activists, and even government employees. They each saw things in their own way. They each had their perspective on life.

And then... they met Jesus. And everything started to change. The more they followed Jesus, the more they listened to him, they began to realize that Jesus saw things differently... and Jesus wants *us* to see the world through his eyes, with his perspective.

What was Jesus’s perspective? Well...

“Love your enemies...” he said.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,” he said.

“Forgive 70 times 7” he said.

“You can’t serve God and money” he said.

“Pick up your cross,” “love each other as I have loved you.” That’s what he said. That’s how he saw the world.

The first followers of Jesus started to see themselves and each other differently. They started to see God differently. They started to see a future full of hope.

And then... he was arrested, beaten, crucified, and sealed up in a tomb. In those painful first days, his disciples couldn’t see anything clearly any more. Was it all over? Did they have to go back to seeing things the way they had before?

Matthew tells us that, early on that Sunday morning, two women went to “see the tomb.” I am

fairly certain that they expected the tomb to look like every other tomb.

After all, a tomb is a tomb, right? It's where we all end up. Tombs are about tears, and death, and hopelessness. Tombs look like *the end*.

They went to "see" the tomb. But something happened there, and their perspective was forever changed.

They thought they would see the dead end of Jesus, but instead they saw blazing light, dazzling white, a stone rolled back, an empty shelf where the body should be. They saw and believed. "He is not here. He is raised."

When you have an experience like that, you begin to see everything differently. Matthew says that the women were "fearful yet overjoyed" as they rushed to tell the rest. Then they saw *him*. Alive.

And ever since that first Easter morning, that *universe*-changing experience has given Christian people the ability to see everything differently.

Remember my mom's comment about childbirth? She said that it was the most frightening thing she ever experienced, but also she had never been so happy?

Frightened, and joyful. That's what Matthew tells us about the women as they ran from the tomb. They were 'fearful yet overjoyed.'

My friends, *that* is precisely what the resurrection of Jesus does to the way we see the world. The resurrection perspective is this: I can face whatever fearful, frightening, painful thing there is here on earth, because I know that the Risen Lord is going to show me a way to be joyful.

I can look at every cross I have to carry, and I can say to that cross, "yes, you're heavy. But the Risen Lord is going to make me strong enough to deal with you."

I can look at every moment of suffering, and I can say, "yes, this pain is real, but the Risen Lord is going to make me whole."

I can look at everything that tries to bind me, everything that tries to rob my freedom and take my hope away...

I can look at every part of my life that feels lifeless and dry, and I can say, "The Risen Lord is with me. And if the tomb couldn't hold him, then nothing on earth can hold me!"

I can look at everything in my life that seems insurmountable, sad and scary and say, “Yes, you’re big and scary, but my God is bigger.”

I can look at this angry, confusing, sometimes violent world, and I can say, “Yes, this world can be crazy, but Christ is transforming this world through the faithful work of his followers.”

I can look at my loved one’s tomb, I can look at my *own* tomb, and I can say to Death, “Yes, you’re real. And some days it looks like you win. But 2000 years ago everyone thought you had won too. Yet when those women went to see the tomb, they saw that it was empty. They saw that Death doesn’t get the last word – God does. Loss doesn’t get the last word – Life does.”

When we talk about perspective, we sometimes ask, “Is the glass half-full or half-empty?”

But for Christians, the Easter perspective is this: **the tomb is fully empty, so the cup of life is fully full!**

The tomb is fully empty – so my heart is full of hope.

The tomb is fully empty – so the Living Jesus is with me now.

The tomb is fully empty – Death’s power over us is drained – the rivers of hate and hopelessness are dry.

Look at the tomb. See the tomb. It’s empty.

Look at your life. It is full. Full of him. Full of Jesus, the one who leads us through fear to joy.