

Easter Sunday, 2020
Saint Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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“80% of all people will fail this test!”

That's what the headline screamed on my Facebook timeline. It caught my attention...

“80 % of all people will fail this test: Name a city in Virginia that does not have the letter “e” in the name?” Really? Richmond! Ashland! Downtown Short Pump!

Have you noticed how often these quizzes pop up on your Facebook page? Not long ago, I saw another quiz: “Name some man-made things you can see from space?” I came up with 2 – the Great Wall of China, and Donald trump's hair.

Usually, I see one of these quizzes and I quickly move on.

But awhile back – back when you could actually have dinner in a restaurant - I came across a quiz which made me stop and think.

It was a link from a web page called “Worldwide Hippies.” (And here I should assure you that I am *not* a regular visitor to anything called “Worldwide Hippies!”)

But the invitation from the web page was simple. It said: “Write the happiest story you can think of, using only four words.”

I asked myself, “How do you tell a happy story in four words?”

But then I started to read people's submissions, and I was deeply moved.

Remember, the challenge was, “Write the happiest story, using only four words.”

Here were some of the answers:

- + my child was born
- + he loved her always

Some reflected daily life. For instance:

- + she got the job

- + I won the lottery
- + Diaper was not dirty!

You will not be surprised that one of my favorites had to do with food. The happiest story you can write with four words is: “chocolate causes weight loss.”

I saw that quiz back before this public health crisis. But in recent days I started think: what would be the best story about the pandemic that could be written in 4 words? Maybe it would be:

- + the virus went away
- + families ate dinner together
- + neighbors looked after neighbors

Or maybe this one: kids returned to school

This facebook quiz made me think. Then, it made me pray. And finally I realized that the happiest story in human history was written with just four words. It is the story that changed everything, the story that gives us hope, the story that allows me to believe that my life has meaning.

And what is that happy, four word story? Simple:

The tomb was empty.

Matthew tells the Resurrection story with just a few words. He used *many* words to describe the passion and death of Jesus, but the account of that first Easter Sunday almost has the feel of breathless excitement.

*As the first day of the week was dawning...
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb...*

They had watched him die. They buried him in the tomb They knew *one* thing – *he was dead*. That morning, their only expectation was that they would pray near his tomb.

But breathlessly, Matthew tells it...

*The stone was rolled back... the angel appeared...
the body wasn't there.*

Four words: *do not be afraid*.

Another four words: *He is not here.*

Another four words: *He has been raised.*

In other words: *the tomb was empty.*

In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus *is* life! Which means that you and I will *only* find our life, we will *only* find truth, we will *only* find joy, we will *only* find peace, we will *only* find meaning, we will *only* find comfort, strength, and healing, we will *only* find our heart's desire – when we are *in communion with Jesus!*

Whatever we're searching for – he has it. Whatever we're hungry for – he provides it. Whatever we're afraid of – he's conquered it. Whatever kills us – he's overcome it. By *rising*.

We put God in a tomb. But... *the tomb is empty.*

Jesus Christ is Risen.

Easter is not just a celebration of *Jesus'* happy story. Easter is a proclamation of what enables *us* to be happy, and joyful and hope-filled.

The tomb is empty.

Do not be afraid.

Jesus Christ is Risen.

We rise with him.

Jesus confronted death, and God would not allow death to triumph. Day by day- especially in THESE days - in the story of our lives, we have to contend with the powers of death in so many ways. There are many things that try to entomb us. There are hard circumstances right now that are trying to kill our sense of connectedness, our hope, our dreams, our confidence, our faith.

What do we do?

The angel told us what to do. The angel said that the resurrection had occurred just as Jesus had said it would. Just as he said. The angel was telling us to remember the *words of Jesus*.

Remember his message. If you want life, you will begin to find it in the living Word of God.

And in the Scriptures, the Risen One told us where to find him.

The tomb is empty – so we can find life every time we pray.

The tomb is empty – so we find life every time we give, and forgive.

He has been raised – and the risen one told us that we would find life every time we feed the

hungry and give shelter to the homeless and care for neighbors

He has been raised – and the risen one told us that we would find life every time we comfort the afflicted, give without counting the cost, seek justice, act boldly for what is right.

The tomb is empty – and the risen one told us that we would find life every time we do simple acts of service with great love.

The tomb is empty – and the risen one told us that we would find life by belonging to the community of believers, the Church

Do not be afraid! The tomb is empty! He is not there. He has been raised! And we will rise with him, if we live with him.

The women rushed from the tomb, to tell the greatest, happiest, story ever. No matter how many words they used, some folks did not believe the women. But that wasn't the point. The women knew what was true, and they knew that they were supposed to bring the life-giving message of Easter to others.

And...so... must... we.

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