

They came to the tomb, those women who followed Jesus, those women who knew him well. They came to the tomb to do the final preparations, mark the final customs for the one they loved. They came to honour him and remember him - for that is what tombs are: places of memory for those who have died and who remain present there for us in time and space. Tombs are the places to visit, to remember the life shared with the person, and to share those memories. Tombs, quite literally, are signs of remembrance.¹

The women came, bringing their spices, but as they approached they saw that the stone covering the entrance to the tomb no longer closed off the dead from the living. Luke tells us, indeed all the gospel accounts tell us, that the stone was rolled away. Confused, they go in wondering why the stone isn't where it should be and the place where they expected Jesus to be is empty. They see that Jesus' body is not there.

By way of explanation, helping them recall the story of his birth, angels announce the good, surprising news by saying to them, "why do you look for the living among the dead?... Remember what he told you..."

Now, this first Easter morning, the tomb has become not just a sign of death and of memory, but a sign of something new that God has done - a sign of life.

13.8 billion years ago. That was when time and space began. The Big Bang - when life exploded in heat and light. This is when the first atoms were formed: helium, hydrogen, and lithium. But these elements existed separately from one another. Something else had to happen for there to be a bonding of elements. It was theorized that Helium Hydride was that bond. It was believed to be the first molecule to form in the universe minutes after the Big Bang. But scientists couldn't find any evidence of it in space. Until very recently.

¹www.workingpreacher.org, Holly Hearon, April 21, 2019

While some stars die in a spectacular explosion called a supernova, others shed their shell of gas and end up becoming extremely small as well as very dense. The cloud of gas around that is called planetary nebula, and is lit by the diminished star at its centre.² NGC 7027 is one of the brightest planetary nebula in our night sky and mimics most closely the conditions after the Big Bang. With the help of a specially crafted Boeing airplane, team researchers pointed a specially equipped telescope at NGC 7027 for three days in May 2016. And they found it.

Helium Hydride was the universe's first molecular bond and kick started the formation of other molecules. When it reacted with a hydrogen atom, for example, it created molecular hydrogen which marked the beginning of the modern universe. "This bonding molecule, is the first step on a path of increasing complexity that ends up with very complicated things in the universe, like very complicated molecules, like DNA," said David Neufeld an astrophysicist who worked on the discovery. "...what started out as a very boring, smooth universe just containing atoms can end up with more complicated structures, molecules, and ultimately, as we know, life."³

We search for signs of life, the complexity of it, the unexpectedness of it, the beauty of it. Not only in theory, not merely an idle tale, as it were, but the existence of it.

This day, this Easter morning, what we discover is resurrected life.

Canadian Catholic theologian and philosopher, Jean Vanier is now in palliative care. And many across the world are praying for him, as he touched the lives of so many of us through his teachings and writings. He has lived an amazingly complex and full life.

² www.cnn.com, Ashley Strickland, April 17, 2019

³ www.cbc.ca, Nicole Mortillaro, April 17, 2019

In 1964 he founded L'Arche (the Ark), the international federation of communities spread now over 37 countries for people with physical and cognitive challenges and those who live with them to assist them. As the community does here in London.

Vanier's life took turns, as any life does, and instead of further pursuing a prestigious naval career, he worked on and received his PhD in philosophy and became an academic, teaching at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Later on in his life he would encounter people who were institutionalized with development challenges and thought there must be a better way to help, heal and connect with them. This spurred him, along with others, to develop L'Arche.

The path he walked in these communities was not easy, not always uncomplicated. It came with steep learning curves, frustrations, and disappointments. But it also came with growth, joy, and binding relationships.

Vanier once remembered asking the community psychiatrist what it meant to be a pure human person. He remembers the man's unhesitating answer - "tenderness."⁴

Vanier experienced for himself and wrote about the tenderness of the disabled. He knew it helped to heal us and set us free from over intellectualizing our faith.⁵ From having it all correct in our heads.

He knew that tending to the needs and caring for those who are vulnerable and marginalized, is never a burden for us, instead that those people and moments are teachers for us, showing us the very presence of Jesus.⁶ Vanier said of his life and our lives lived within the loving bonds of

⁴ www.commonwealmagazine.org, Michael W. Higgins, December 15, 2015

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

resurrection, “We are not called by God to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”

The tomb is empty. Remember what he told you.

This day we gather to celebrate the most unexpected of events: resurrection. We come perhaps just as perplexed as those women were when they saw that the stone was rolled away, expecting death, but instead hearing the good news of life which forever binds us together with Christ and forever binds us together with one another.

It is the binding with the dying and the rising Christ, through the healing and loving and life-giving waters of baptism that kick starts this resurrected life for us.

Of course, what resurrection means is different for each us, as we experience it. We are not all Jean Vanier. His is one story. But each of us has a story to remember and to tell of resurrection, the times when we have encountered the empty tomb and the risen Christ. I certainly can't name them for you. But you and I know resurrection when it happens.

Resurrection, this complex, not so smooth, life that Jesus invites us into might be a change in perspective. Or a deepening faith where we aren't afraid of our own or other people's questions. It could be a turn in direction, an awakening to new possibilities for your life. Or it might be a burden that you have carried for far too long and have finally let go of. It might be a fear that you once held but that no longer controls you or your behaviour. Or perhaps it is a love that takes hold of you and shows you how to love again when you thought you had forgotten how. In any and all cases, resurrection tells us that death no longer holds the cards of our lives. Resurrection is life exploding in light, in unlikely and complicated and beautiful ways.

Just as those women who went and told the other disciples what seemed to be an idle tale, it's important for you, for me, to go to the places of memory, to look for the signs of life, and to tell the stories of encountering the unexpected and complex mystery of the God who will always roll the stone away. Of the God who conquers death out of passionate and tender care for you and for me. Of the God who does the extraordinary out of an infinite and vast love for you and for me.

The tomb is empty. Remember what he told you.

Now it's your turn. And mine. Go and tell what seems like an idle tale: He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.