

Church of the Crossroads
Easter Vigil Homily
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“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and
they did not believe them.” —Luke 24:11

This is a most curious response on the part of the male disciples to the words of the women. The Oxford Dictionary defines “idle” as “useless, having no special purpose, groundless.” The women, upon seeing the empty tomb and hearing the two men in dazzling white remind them that Jesus had said that “the Son of man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again,” themselves remembered. (Lk 24:7) Did not those male disciples remember those same words? They seem to us memorable, not words easily forgotten. Why then, did the news of the women seem to them an idle tale? Was it because the news was delivered by women, and therefore not to be trusted? Perhaps. But we sense that something more is going on here.

May I suggest that to the disciples the words of the women reporting the news of the resurrection seemed to them an idle tale because this is what they *wanted* the words to be. They preferred an idle tale, because if the words of the women were to be taken seriously, the disciples would have to do something they preferred not to do, and that was to get back into the business of discipleship.

It has been quite the journey, this time with Jesus. For a time it had been exhilarating, adventuresome, exciting. Finally, they had found someone to follow. Finally, they had discovered an ideal to be lived. As for Jesus predicting that the son of man would end up on a cross, perhaps Jesus was referring to someone else—someone who would come after him. Anyway, the whole affair had ended rather badly, with their leader put to death. And as for the disciples themselves, they had acted shamefully. In the hour of their leader’s deepest need, they had deserted him and fled.

So now they had retreated and hunkered down. Just a little relief had set in. “Well, we acted shamefully, but that cannot now be helped. Our leader is dead, so that is that. We were foolish to have expected more. It was

good while it lasted, but now it's back to the security and safety of things as usual. Now it's back to fishing."

All of a sudden, the women come with the news that the tomb was empty and the news of the men in dazzling clothes, who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

"Oh, no, who needs this? We had things quite settled, thank you very much. Does this mean that we are going to have to leave this hiding place, and go out there to find him? Does this mean we are going to have to face the one we deserted? Does it mean that we are going to have to accept all that risk, all over again? Best to treat this as an idle tale."

But they could not. Our story ends with Peter getting up and running to the tomb to see for himself. Even though it was perhaps preferable to receive the words of the women as an idle tale, it could not remain an idle tale forever.

We are so like the disciples that it is uncanny. As I have said so many times now, the real situation we face in our lives and in the life of the world is the loss of hope. We have come to believe that life cannot change, that it doesn't matter who occupies the White House, that there will always be injustice, war, and bloodshed in the earth, and that we are powerless to do anything about it. In the face of the loss of such hope, we have retreated from the world and have occupied ourselves with our own security and well-being. We have hunkered down, in our own way.

But now comes the news: "He is not here, but has risen." The news makes it way through our hopeless lives, and we are faced with the demand of Easter. Are we going to treat the story as an idle tale—a useless, purposeless, and groundless story—or will we allow it to stir us into risky discipleship. Those male disciples finally chose the latter, and I trust that we may follow in their footsteps.

Easter is an invitation to renewed discipleship. Jesus has risen, and we are invited to hold fast to the hope we have forsaken, but which is still there, needing only to be reawakened within us. We are invited to leave our hiding places and enter the world with renewed faith and courage so that through us God may do a new thing in the earth. May God grant us the grace so to do, for Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!