

“Or...maybe...our story is true!”

John 20:1-29

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

April 12, 2020—Easter Sunday!

According to the scriptures, on the third morning after Jesus’s death, two of the disciples ran with abandon to the cemetery, after Mary Magdalene reported that the stone had been rolled away-- that the tomb was open. One of the disciples is identified as Simon Peter, while the other is described here, and elsewhere in the Gospel of John, not by name, but as ‘the one whom Jesus loved’.

We are told at the very end of the Gospel: “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them down, and we know that his testimony is true.” Again, a reference in the third person, not by name. I guess if you thought yourself that close to Jesus, you would proudly announce, as the writer did, not just once but twice in today’s passage, that in fact you outran your fellow disciple, and reached the tomb first. (In sandals, yet!) I guess if you thought yourself that close to Jesus, you would want to be the one to tell the incredible story, and announce that it is true.

Clarence W. Hull, a venerated Irish Catholic, states succinctly: “Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there.”

A few Easters ago, Sony Pictures released a film that infers the same about Jesus’s death and resurrection: “You can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there”. The film, entitled “Risen”, portrays the events in Jerusalem that surround the Gospel account that inspires our Easter observance. The story is retold from the perspective of a fictional Roman military officer named Clavius. Clavius is charged by Pilate, who is intent on preventing an insurrection, with the task of finding the body of the crucified Jesus. Pilate is threatened by the rumors that Jesus had escaped his sealed grave.

Clavius embarks on the mission, but becomes increasingly frustrated and bewildered by the failed search. He finds Bartholomew, one of the lesser known of Jesus's disciples, and sternly confronts him: "Where are his followers? Tell me, and you'll go free! Where are his followers?" Bartholomew whispers in the officer's ear: "Everywhere!", and he dances off—free!

Clavius finds Mary Magdalene, who advises him: "You're looking for something you'll never find. Open your heart and see!" The exasperated Clavius demands: "Where is he?!" Mary coyly, coolly, and confidently replies: "He is here!"

Nor can Clavius get the truth that he wants out of the soldiers whom he had assigned to guard the tomb. They could only report what they had observed, that something like an earthquake had broken the grave open and somehow released its contents! Clavius accuses them of being drunk, of lying to him, of "fake news", as it were. One of the soldiers, eyes wide open in amazement, suggests to Clavius: "Or...maybe...our story is true!"

As the story unfolds, it becomes more and more evident that Clavius can't handle the truth!

"Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there!"

Emily Selke, a summa cum laude graduate of Virginia's Woodbridge High School in 2010, was known at Drexel University as "an ebullient spirit with a gleaming smile". Emily died just before Easter five years ago, with her mother Yvonne and 148 other passengers when a co-pilot intentionally crashed their plane in the Swiss Alps. Her friends in Philadelphia organized a music festival to honor the memory of Emily and Yvonne, benefitting a foundation in their name. One organizer said: "Emily was one of the best friends any of us could have ever had."

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there!

Syria in the 20teens...

Afghanistan in the 2000's...

Rwanda in the 1990's...

Sudan in the 1980's...

Cambodia in the 1970's...

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there.

Oppression in North Korea...

Apartheid in South Africa...

Slavery in America...

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Wuhan...

New York City...

New Orleans...

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Even fictional Clavius, the one whose career was killing bodies, but who was desperate finally to find one very particular body, when asked by callous Pilate what he wants in life, admits: "A day without death...Peace!" Even Clavius, the one who fails his mission but finds his soul, in the end admits: "I believe. I can never be the same."

So...run with abandon to the cemetery.

If you think you have been close to Jesus—maybe the one whom Jesus loves—of course you would want to be the one to tell the incredible story.

Where are his followers?

“Everywhere!”

Where is He?

“Open your heart and see...He is here!”

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there.

Or...maybe...our story is true!