

Religion

Easter is the time to re-think reality

By JIM RYAN
Herald Special
Second Sunday of Easter
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John 20: 19-31



Religion and Reality by Jim Ryan

FILL IN THE BLANK: EMPTY TOMB
Easter is the season in the year when we can all rethink reality. After all, if someone can rise from the dead, what's keeping me in this dead-end job, this life-denying habit, this miserable relationship, this... whatever.

You will in the blank. Filling in the blank is what Easter is all about. The blank, historically speaking, according to the Gospel writers, is the empty tomb.

There should have been a body. I mean, if you can't rely on death, what can you rely on, aside from the G.S.T.

A body which had been dead and buried, was no longer buried, and apparently was not dead.

FILL IN THE BLANK IN OUR OWN LIVES

Easter is the season that brings tears to our eyes. It's the season

when we can all fill in the blanks ourselves. (And don't tell me you don't know what you want in your blank.)

It's the season when ugly ducklings become beautiful swans, when Rip Van Winkles wake up and face the world, and when Sleeping Beauties wake up and face a skin rash.

I met a woman two days after Easter who'd spent the weekend in Edmonton going from house to

house with a real estate agent, until she found a rambling, crazy old place that would become a home for her family. She's moving out there at the end of the school year with her two sons and her husband.

She's going back to the theatre, leaving a secure job, taking a cut in pay, and waking up to life.

That sounds like a pretty good resurrection story to me.

When was the last time you sat around with friends and had a resurrection party, trading resurrection stories?

Do it. You'll be surprised. **FILL IN THE BLANK: EMPTY CHURCHES**

The Saturday Star on the Easter weekend was full of depressing stories about religion and empty churches.

This is not the central issue.

People are still experiencing epiphanies and resurrections, and reality is still full of the dearest freshness deep down things.

Peace be with you. There's still life, and life is good, even in a

recession.

AN OLDE HOMILY
John writes that those who believe without seeing will be blessed. Yet this seems like scant consolation. Belief is always uncertain and vague. If we could only say with the certainty of John that Jesus is the one we have touched with our hands. This could be the intellectual touch of Thomas, who in a sense wants to nail Jesus down again, or the loving, faithful touch of Mary Magdalene.

Is there a way we can begin to touch our faith in the risen Christ, can we begin not merely to assent to the fact of the resurrection, but to have our wills and our lives changed by it?

Faith is after all a very human thing. We have faith in time and space, in the laws of nature, and in other people. But what if, as so often happens, our faith were to be shattered, what if time, space,

nature and people did not act according to form? What if our senses, our thoughts about how or what life is, betrayed us?

The apparent meaning, the apparent order, our faith in our universe, would vanish. We would be left without anything to grasp.

What would we do in the face of such chaos? We could deny it, not permitting our faith to be shaped by reality, holding on to an old faith that has proven to be a lie; or we could accept, even grasp the chaos, willing to face the chaos within ourselves and our communities.

The early Christian communities, Mary Magdalene and Thomas among them, faced such an experience of chaos. The surprising thing is that out of that chaos came the resurrection of Christ and a strong faith-filled community that still, occasionally, is a wonder to behold.

Christ is Risen

By The Reverend Margaret Murray
St. John's Anglican Church, Stewarttown and St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Hornby.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
Morning has broken, like the first morning.
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing; Praise for the morning;
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word.

Sweet the rains new fall, sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dew fall, on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness, on the wet garden
Sprung in completeness, where his feet pass.

The old days has passed away!
The old way is gone! A new day, has dawned!

Never again can we believe that the powers of evil will prevail! In that thunderous darkness of that Friday so many years ago, it must have seemed as if evil had triumphed. But Jesus is the victor because he never 'sold out'. He willingly gave his life rather than succumbing to the power of evil.

Never again can we believe in death as an overwhelming

power! Death has always seemed like the enemy of life. But even death could not contain or subdue the person of Jesus! Even death is disarmed and life goes on - beyond death! Death is but a doorway to a new way of living.

Never again can we believe that God could abandon us - to the powers of evil and death! Knowing our muddled ways, it has seemed as if God would eventually lose patience and give up on us. But 'Can a woman forget her child... Even these may forget, Yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have carved you on the palms of my hands. (Isaiah 49)

And so...the 'piece de resistance'...instead of abandoning us to the powers of evil and death, God has made a mockery of the powers of evil and outsmarted death itself!

Old assumptions evaporate. This is a new beginning. Joy and Hope abound and we are invited anew into the adventure of Life - restored, reconciled, re-created! A new day has dawned!

Mine is the sunlight; Mine is the morning,
Born of the one Light, Eden saw play.
Praise with elation; Praise every morning,
God's re-creation of the new day!
(Cat Stevens - Morning has Broken)

Hospitals

A new breed of volunteer adds to hospital efficiency

By HILARY SHORT
There's a new breed of volunteer in our hospitals today - people with busy schedules and full-time jobs who take great satisfaction in helping others during evenings or weekends.

There are more opportunities for volunteers today, and they are better trained and prepared than ever before.

Volunteers may help out in the emergency ward by offering information and emotional support to families in stressful situations.

They may work at information desks, assist in the admitting office, deliver lab reports, or pay friendly visits to patients to help brighten their day.

A special type of volunteer might work with the terminally ill. Those who have the ability can often provide much-needed support by simply being good listeners.

With more out-patient services provided by hospitals, there is a growing need for volunteers to help patients waiting for treatment.

As patients move from the hospital back to the community, volunteers can provide a valuable link to the network of other available services because they are often also members of community-support agencies such as Meals-on-Wheels or the Canadian Cancer Society.

In addition, volunteers can be advocates for hospital improvements because they see first-hand what is needed. Through fund-raising drives or other efforts, they can and do get things done.

Changing lifestyles have altered the face of hospital volunteerism in Ontario. With more women now in the work force, there are fewer "stay-at-home moms" who traditionally provided much of this service. Increasingly, men are joining the ranks of volunteers.

In addition, people who have taken early retirement are finding that they can put their skills and experience to valuable use as hospital volunteers.

Newer Canadians, too, can find opportunities to get involved in their communities. As they help others, they can learn the culture and language of their new country, as well as apply experience they've acquired in their homelands.

Students and others, who are pursuing careers in health care,

are also finding that they can gain practical experience as volunteers.

Jackie Farquhar, president of the Ontario Association of Directors of Health Care Volunteer Services, explains that "volunteers want to feel they are a part of the health care team." Farquhar is also the manager of volunteer services at the University Hospital in London, Ontario. The association comprises salaried hospital staff members who coordinate volunteer activities.

"I find volunteers often want a totally different slant from their everyday jobs or lives," says Farquhar.

A computer programmer or a young mother, for example, may enjoy getting out and talking with patients.

Farquhar points to the case of a recent immigrant who was a physiotherapist in Poland. He volunteers as an assistant in physiotherapy during the day after his night-shift in a factory.

For David Boyce, one of the few men to be president of a hospital auxiliary in the province, volunteer work has been a great source of personal pleasure and satisfaction after a career as a manager in a major multinational corporation.

Boyce has been involved with Toronto Grace Salvation Army Hospital since he retired six years ago. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Hospital Auxiliaries Association of Ontario (HAAO).

While men make up only about 10 per cent of hospital volunteers, Boyce says their numbers are growing.

Boyce spends time with patients in the therapeutic recreation department where there are drama classes, outings and current events discussion groups.

Because it is a long-term care hospital, Boyce says "we are try-

ing to bring quality to the patients' lives - to make it a home for them because it is their home."

"Today's volunteers are looking for something meaningful - they want to feel that they are of value to the organization," says Marie Hewitt, president-elect of the HAAO. Hewitt, a Hagersville resident, also chairs the board of governors of the West Haldimand General Hospital.

Most volunteers are members of local hospital auxiliaries. And it is the auxiliaries which, through their historic fundraising activities, helped build many of the province's hospitals in addition to providing volunteer service.

Today, there are over 31,000 active hospital volunteers. Collectively they have raised \$17 million a year for improving hospital facilities, as well as providing services to make patients' stay in hospital easier.

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