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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

Sunday, April 9, 2023

Easter Day, All Years, Revised Common Lectionary

[Jeremiah 31:1-6](#)

[Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

[John 20:1-18](#)

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So a lot of people have had some sort of strange, uncanny, or unexplained experiences in their lives. One of the interesting things about being a priest is that occasionally people tell you about theirs. Visions of Jesus; visits from departed loved ones; angelic encounters, astonishing coincidences, and so on.

When I was young I used to ask God to give me some kind of miraculous experience like that. Sometimes I still do, because honestly, how cool would that be? But so far it hasn't been my fate. Except for this one thing, which I believe is a contender for the title of World's Most Insignificant Uncanny Experience. It's so tiny and dumb I hesitate even to tell it, let alone in a highly public forum on Easter Day. But here we are. It happened ten years ago while I was living in Seattle and getting ready for a camping trip. I went into my apartment closet and reached up to a high shelf where I had a camp stove stored, and on top of the stove a little camp cookpot. I stretched up on tiptoe and lifted down the stove. But no cookpot came with it.

I looked back up at the shelf and there was the pot, exactly where it had been. And I mean, exactly where it had been. Not sitting on the shelf, but resting in thin air four inches above the shelf, right where it had been when the stove was under it.

I did a double take and looked at it again. There it was. Plain as day. Levitating pot. I stepped out of the closet and put the stove down, then came back in. There it still was. I stared at it for a bit. I thought about grabbing it down, but it seemed disrespectful to interrupt a mysteriously levitating pot. Finally I stepped out of the closet again for a moment. And when I came back in, though I hadn't heard any sound of it falling, there it was sitting on the shelf as if nothing had ever happened.

Now I wondered, then and now, just what to make of this experience. I hadn't been consuming any mind-altering substances. The only pot in this story is the levitating one. I saw what I saw. But maybe my eyes were deceiving me. Or maybe the pot had been touching the wall behind it, and had been stored up there so long that somehow the paint behind it got gummy and fused to it, just enough to hold it up for a few moments when the stove was removed. Or maybe somebody was playing a practical joke on me and had rigged it up with magnets. Who knows? One thing I can say is that this experience has left precisely no long-term impact on my life. Other than the vague curiosity of what the heck happened, that is. But as for a greater significance, you can let me know if you can come up with one, but I just can't see what kind of message God or the universe or a friendly spirit might have wanted to send me with a two-minute-levitating camp pot. It's not the kind of thing you can really theologize.

I am sure there are people in this room who have way more interesting uncanny experiences to share. Maybe you'll share some of them with us at coffee hour. But there's mine. Not a lot of deep meaning. All I can do is offer the raw facts of my experience.

One of the things I love about the Easter story we heard today in its version from the gospel of John is how Mary Magdalene stays with the raw facts of her experience. She rushes to the other disciples and she says to them, "I have seen the Lord!" Not "God has raised Jesus from the dead!" or "Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior!" or "Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity!" She rushes breathlessly in and tells them what her eyes have seen. "I have seen the Lord!"

But unlike my experience with a levitating pot, this experience will have implications for the rest of her life. And not hers alone. For two reasons.

The first is because of who it is that she's seen. This is not just anyone she has seen but the one she has come to know as the Lord: the teacher, the healer, the one who has drawn her and so many others to himself to follow him. The one who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; who said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"; who said, "I have come among you not to be served, but to serve"; who said, "Follow me." And this is the Crucified One; the one whose love and integrity and passion for God and for us made him a threat to those in power and led him to a criminal's public death. This is the one whose loving, liberating leadership had gained her allegiance and whom human power had snuffed out. So this uncanny experience of Mary's is not a momentary curiosity to scratch her head about but a life-altering turnaround. If Jesus is alive again, then everything is changed.

And the second reason is because this experience won't stand on its own. Not only Mary but others will begin to have their own encounters with this risen Lord. Disciples like Peter and James. Even former enemies of Jesus' movement like Paul. In those weeks and months after the first Easter, enough of them had their own profound experiences of encountering the risen Jesus that the movement he had begun, far from being squelched by his crucifixion, was galvanized by the conviction that he was alive again, and not just alive but one with God, propelling them out to continue his mission of love and blessing to the far corners of the earth. They went from a scattered band of fearful, demoralized ex-disciples to a family of bold apostles on a mission. And when they, like Jesus, suffered and even died for their faith in him, they were prepared to walk in the way Jesus had walked: to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them.

That movement is continuing to this day. And it continues to gather more and more of us in, joining us with him in his risen life. Most of us may never have a mystical encounter with the risen Jesus. But we can point to the ways he has transformed us nonetheless, the ways we meet him every week in the holy meal of Communion, and the ways we meet him every day as we share our lives and care for the sick and feed the hungry, as we study scripture and sing and serve. He's here among us today, and calling us to follow him: to join in his movement, to pray and work and struggle and rejoice until the full day dawns and we are swept up into his song of Alleluia through all eternity.