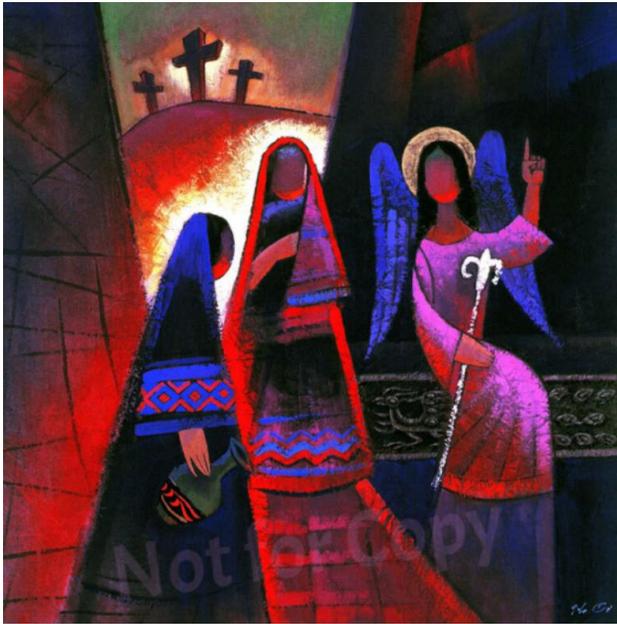


From Rev. Willie J. Smith

Easter



Easter is not a day but **50 Days**. It is a liturgical season in which Jesus' Resurrection is celebrated.

A few facts about this Season.

Easter has no set date. It is determined by the first full moon that falls on or after the vernal equinox (Spring).

It is a movable feast the earliest is March 21st the latest April 25th. The full moon in a year is April 1st which means

Easter is Sunday April 5th. Also, Easter is related to the timing of the Jewish Passover, as the last supper occurred during a Passover seder.

The Alleluia returns. There is no Confession and absolution and await the Promise of

The Holy Spirit.

Now that you know the history, **How will you celebrate Alleluia this year?**

Here are some offerings from Frederick Buchner from *Whistling in the Dark* for you to consider.

The Gospels are far from clear as to just what happened. It began in the dark. The stone had been rolled aside. Matthew alone speaks of an earthquake. In the tomb there were two white-clad figures or possibly just one. Mary Magdalen seems to have gotten there before anybody else. There was a man she thought at first was the gardener. Perhaps Mary the mother of James was with her and another woman named Joanna. One account says Peter came too with one of the other disciples. Elsewhere the suggestion is that there were only the women and that the disciples, who were somewhere else, didn't believe the women's story when they heard it. There was the sound of people running, of voices. Matthew speaks of "fear and great joy." Confusion was everywhere. There is no agreement even as to the role of Jesus himself. Did he appear at the tomb or only later? Where? To whom did he appear? What did he say? What did he do?

It is not a major production at all, and the minor attractions we have created around it — the bunnies and baskets and bonnets, the dyed eggs — have so little to do with what it's all about that they neither add much nor subtract much. It's not really even much of a story when you come right down to it, and that is of course the power of it. It doesn't have the ring of great drama. It has the ring of truth. If the Gospel writers had wanted to tell it in a way to convince the world that Jesus indeed rose from the dead, they would presumably have done it with all the skill and fanfare they could muster. Here there is no skill, no fanfare. They seem to be telling it simply the way it was. The narrative is as fragmented, shadowy,

incomplete as life itself. When it comes to just what happened, there can be no certainty. That something unimaginable happened, there can be no doubt.

The symbol of Easter is the empty tomb. You can't depict or domesticate emptiness. You can't make it into pageants and string it with lights. It doesn't move people to give presents to each other or sing old songs. It ebbs and flows all around us, the Eastertide. Even the great choruses of Handel's *Messiah* sound a little like a handful of crickets chirping under the moon.

He rose. A few saw him briefly and talked to him. If it is true, there is nothing left to say. If it is not true, there is nothing left to say. For believers and unbelievers both, life has never been the same again. For some, neither has death. What is left now is the emptiness. There are those who, like Magdalen, will never stop searching it till they find his face.

THERE IS AN OBSCURE PASSAGE in the First Letter of Peter where the old saint writes that after the crucifixion, Jesus went and preached to "the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey" (3:19-20), and it's not altogether clear just what spirits he had in mind. Later on, however, he is not obscure at all. "The gospel was preached even to the dead," he says, "that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God" (4:5-6). "He descended into hell," is the way the Apostles' Creed puts it, of course. It has an almost blasphemous thud to it, sandwiched there between the muffled drums of "was crucified, dead, and buried" and the trumpet blast of "the third day he rose again from the dead." Christ of all people, in hell of all places! It strains the imagination to picture it, the Light of the World making his way through the terrible dark to save whatever ones he can. Yet in view of what he'd seen of the world during his last few days in the thick of it, maybe the transition wasn't as hard as you might think.

The fancifulness of the picture gives way to what seems, the more you turn it over in your mind, the inevitability of it. Of course that is where he would have gone. Of course that is what he would have done. Christ is always descending and reascending into hell.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden" is spoken to *all*, whatever they've done or left undone, whichever side of the grave their hell happens to be on.