

Christianity is *Faith!*

April 08, 2007 (Easter)

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

When I was a child growing up in the coal region of Northeastern Pennsylvania in the 1930s, I was of a generation whose home entertainment was the radio, and like children of today, who have their favorite TV programs, we had our favorite radio programs every day from 5PM to 6PM. (The Lone Ranger came on in prime time.) Every so often, the producers of the children's programs became anxious to find out if anyone was listening, so for a box top and a quarter (25 cents) we could get a Jack Armstrong secret decoder ring, or, a Tom Mix Straight Shooter's wooden straight shooter and lots of other things, mostly junk, but worth a lot on the nostalgia market today. Having responded to the come-on, I would begin the long wait, day after day, week after week, I would run to the mailbox only to find it empty. Finally the big day came and whatever it was, was there. Girls in love still run to the phone for the right call, late comers hurry to Church, commuters make record breaking sprints to the bus or the train, all rushing,

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expecting to find *something* at the far end of their hurry.

And so it is in the Easter Gospel. We find the women going to a tomb, and in their sub-conscious at least, hoping to find *nothing*. They were bewildered by what they didn't see, but I imagine they would have been inwardly deeply disappointed if they had found something. Happily, there was no one there. And that's the point: it *had to be nothing!* If there had been something, anything at all, there could be no Christianity. If the body of our Lord had been there, that would have been the end of everything. His credibility all along had been based on the claim that on the third day, he would rise again. But, suppose the women had found an explanation, perhaps a scroll with a scientific explanation how he had disappeared and how God will do it with us one day, an explanation of the Resurrection. If there had been

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anything more than nothing in that tomb, Christianity would be dead.

Christianity is not an explanation. Christianity is *Faith!* We don't explain the Resurrection. We don't *have* to explain the Resurrection. It was an event we cannot fit into human conceptual limits. We don't explain it, rather we *proclaim it*. We say that it happened. We say that other significant things happened because of it. We say that the Resurrection is testimony that God's universe is more than human reason can verify. Faith is *robbed* by explanations and demonstrations.

In the fact that the women found nothing in the tomb, lies everything that means anything in the Christian Faith. Never has so little meant so much. Our critics don't want to believe that there is no natural explanation. They claim the disciples arranged it all by spiriting the corpse away and look down their noses at

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the faith of those who believe. Even the disciples were of a mind to dismiss the report as fancy when the women brought it to them. But, we, from the vantage point of 2,000 years, know better. There is a great deal more left unexplained by denying the Resurrection than by believing it. The Christian Church, the Apostle Paul and the New Testament.....none of these explain the Resurrection. The Resurrection explains them. So it is with all that has followed in its wake. St. Augustine, a Bach chorale, and *us*, here in this place on Easter Day, none of these explain the Resurrection, but all of them are explained by it, because something happened after the crucifixion of our Lord which caused a handful of men to quit shaking all over and break out with courage, power, daring and downright reckless living.

Our critics would say that given enough time, logic would come up with an explanation for the empty tomb. We don't live by logic, not eternally. We live by

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faith and our faith calls it *triumph!* Our faith affirms, insists and proclaims that the empty Easter tomb spells the greatest triumph of all time, beginning with Jesus Christ and ending in fulfillment in our hearts.

The story is told that, near the end of World War I, when the British troops under General Allenby captured Jerusalem, his Staff suggested that Allenby ride into the city on his horse at the head of his troops. This he refused to do saying, *I shall walk into Jerusalem even as our Lord walked into the City for his crucifixion.* As Allenby entered the city, citizens told him that, before the Turks evacuated Jerusalem, they had robbed it of all its' treasures. The real treasure of Jerusalem neither the Turks, nor anyone else could steal. The real treasure is an empty tomb.

The empty tomb proclaims that the Good Friday verdict against Jesus is not the end. Where you and I, in our lives, may have failed at times to pass a verdict

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for the King, Easter and its victory says we have another chance. God has the last word, *triumph, for all of us.*

Russian peasants, before the rise of the Soviet Union, used to greet each other joyously on Easter Day, and probably do again, with the acclamation, ***CHRIST IS RISEN!*** As though this moment had just happened to them. Let the sound of our Alleluias, Anthems and Amens sound every bit as fresh and full of the New Creation for *all* of us as it was on that first day of the week when the power of eternal death was vanquished in Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.