

Easter Vigil

WE HOPE FOR WHAT IS NOT SEEN

John 20:1-8

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.

DIAGNOSIS: ONE ROTTEN APPLE SPOILS THEM ALL

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *We Hope for Meaning*

The dead are not raised. The dead are not raised to life again where we can see them. People, in order to demonstrate that they have worth, to overcome the loss by death of love ones, choose to believe different things about life after death. Greek

mythology claimed that a boat takes you to the other side of the River Styx; the Egyptians believed that if your heart was not weighed down by having done wrong things and weighed less than a feather on a balance scale, then you were granted life after death; modern lore claims that you go down a tunnel toward the light; some cultures say that your soul lives as long as your ancestors remember you; still others argue there is nothing. We cannot see and cannot know if the dead are raised. That is a fact of life. People in Thessalonica grieved for those who died as if they had no hope, and Christians in their society were grieving the same way (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The Christians in Corinth were the audience Paul addressed when he talked about the belief that the dead are not raised (1 Cor. 15:12).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Hope Is All Over the Place*

When Peter and John saw the empty tomb, is it any wonder that Peter did not believe Jesus had been raised from the dead. The dead are not raised. But to believe the dead are not raised is to believe Christ is not raised. To believe that there is heaven or some life after death apart from Christ is to say Christ is not necessary, and to say that God did not send him. Without faith in Jesus, one has not done the works of God (John 6:28-29). Such a belief is not accepted by most, though. Death is just a fact of life, a part of the circle of life, one generation giving way to the next generation. Many say your soul automatically goes to heaven after you die. And 40 percent of people in the U.S. believe in reincarnation. Most also think they are good enough for heaven; therefore they have earned the right to go to heaven.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Law Says There Is No Hope*

But death is more than a fact of life. Death is God's judgment against those who do not believe in Jesus. "Those who do not

believe in him are condemned already” (John 3:18, Fourth Sunday of Lent). “The soul that sins shall die.” “The wages of sin is death.” To say we are not condemned, that death is not God’s judgment, is to say Jesus didn’t die for us. But Jesus has died, one rotten fruit among countless, “He made him to be sin who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

PROGNOSIS: JESUS IS THE FIRST FRUITS

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Is Our Hope*

Peter and John knew Jesus had died. They knew where he was buried. Mary knew and went to the tomb to mourn. But if Jesus was dead, then he could not be Christ; which means that we have no hope—like Cleopas and another disciple on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:21). But Christ has risen! The tomb is empty. “We have seen the Lord!” Jesus appeared to his disciples, to five hundred others at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). Eye witnesses saw Jesus, the Jesus who had been dead, alive! The dead are raised!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Spirit Puts All Our Hope in Jesus*

And not just Jesus is raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of those who have died (1 Cor. 15:20). Those who are in Christ are also raised from the dead. “For if we have been united in a death like his, we shall surely be united in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:5). “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live” (John 11:25). The promise that Jesus is risen for us is how the Holy Spirit works faith in us: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard is the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is in Jesus, instead of an automatic heaven, or reincarnation, or any other hope for life after death. In Jesus there is life with God after death, and God has assured us of this by raising Jesus from the dead.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Our Lives Have Meaning Because Hope Is in Jesus*

Jesus gives us life even though we die. Our fear—that death makes us worthless, or makes us into nothing, or makes life meaningless—is taken away. We have hope that we will be reunited with loved ones who have died. We also experience a holy fear of death as judgment on us, since the end of anything causes judgment on it; at the same time, in faith, we trust that in Christ there is now no condemnation! Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4). Jesus gives us life, making us worth the life of the Son of God. Jesus makes us into his new sisters and brothers so that the meaning of our life is in him and in the love we get to share with one another. Life each day is in forgiveness from Christ, not in what we get done. So, rejoice always! Christ is risen!