

Sound of Easter: News that is richer than words to describe it

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 3, 2007](#) issue

Some ideas are bigger than our intellectual capacity to deal with them. Some news is richer than the words we have to describe it. When that happens, we turn gratefully to art and music and works of the imagination. That's why on Easter we put the emphasis on beautiful hymns and great organ and trumpet music. Words alone cannot convey the message.

From his prison cell in Nazi Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents, "It's a year now since I actually heard a hymn. But the music of the inner ear can often surpass what we hear physically. I get on particularly well with the Easter hymns."

I've always been comforted by the candor of the biblical accounts of the resurrection: Jesus' closest friends and followers had trouble understanding and speaking about what happened. One of the accounts ends abruptly, almost in mid-sentence: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). That ending is so blunt, scholars tell us, that later writers felt that they needed to add a more respectable and aesthetically satisfying ending.

Another account tells us that the first people to arrive at the empty tomb fell flat on their faces in terror. Luke adds—and again I am strangely comforted by his candor—"But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:4, 11).

In his helpful book, *What Jesus Meant*, Gary Wills writes: "The first Christians were not expecting the resurrection. They did not believe it when the women first announced it to them. They had, remember, all scattered and hidden when Jesus was condemned and executed. . . . Yet this band of cowards was suddenly changed into an energetic body of effective evangelists, spreading their faith, firmly offering the claim that Jesus lives."

That old argument for the resurrection is still a compelling one: some transformation occurred in the lives of Jesus' followers such that those who were cowering in fear became fearless witnesses and martyrs. They became convinced that death did not

defeat Jesus, that he was alive and present in the world, and that therefore there was nothing for them to fear, not even their own death.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” the angel asks the women in Luke’s Gospel. “He is not here, but has risen.” And so there is no reason to be afraid or tentative. We can care passionately and love without reservation. We can give our lives to justice, to peace, to Christ’s church, to his kingdom on earth. Jesus went into death. But he is not there. He is risen.