

April 20, Easter 1C (Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 24:1-12)

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by [Sean Gladding](#)

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Oh, to have been a fly on the wall, or perhaps on the edge of the bowl, as Mary turned away to take another spice jar from the rack on the wall to add to the fragrant mix she was pounding in the mortar. I imagine a stray tear fell from time to time, lying atop the oils being mixed with the ground spices. As the women worked steadily to prepare the spices and ointments with which they would provide Jesus with an honorable burial after the horror and ignoble nature of his death, did they do so in silence? Did they discuss what had just happened? Did they relate a favorite memory of the person they were preparing to bury?

I grew up in England in a time before bodies were whisked away to cold storage until the funeral. My mum's mum, my Nanny, died suddenly when I was 12. The women of our family laid her out on her bed upstairs. They washed her body, clothed her in her best dress and shoes, brushed her silver hair, and made sure her dentures were firmly in place. For two days, family, neighbors, and friends stopped by the house to share their sorrow and condolences and—if they wished—to go up the narrow stairs to sit with Nanny for a while and say goodbye. My memory of that time is vague, but I do remember thinking how nice Nanny looked. I also remember that there was lots of laughter as well as tears, as my very large extended family caught up on all the news and told stories. So many stories.

In his telling of Jesus' death, Luke makes a point of highlighting the presence of "the women who had followed him from Galilee" (23:49). After they see where his body is placed—unwashed, naked, hair unbrushed, simply wrapped in a linen cloth—they make preparations to return after the sabbath to honor his body in death.

As they prepared the mixture of oil and spices to mask the smell of decomposition, I think they must have told stories. Because that's what we do. Perhaps Mary of

Magdala relived that most wonderful of before-and-after moments in her life, when Jesus delivered her of the tyranny of the demonic (Luke 8:2) and she became part of the group of women who supported his itinerant mission in the hills of Galilee. Perhaps they told stories of the other wonderful things he did, of the astounding and confounding things he said. I'm sure they lamented the injustice of it all. They probably paused occasionally when one of them related something of Jesus' life, to which the others responded, "I'd forgotten that." As we so often do when we gather to grieve together.

While I have been tempted to believe that the most meaningful words spoken in a church building are said in sanctuaries and classrooms, experience tells me that, more often than not, those words come while we're in other rooms, doing the most mundane tasks. While we're brewing coffee and cutting up donuts for the fellowship hour. While our arms are elbow deep in sudsy water afterward. While we're folding paper boxes that will be filled with a sandwich, a small bowl of soup, and a cookie to be delivered to the food insecure in our community. And perhaps especially while we're preparing a hospitable space for those who grieve, which may well include us, as people gather to honor the deceased. At such times we make small talk, catch up on the news, gossip a little. But sometimes we also unburden ourselves with a trusted confidante, ask hesitantly or desperately for prayer, wrestle with the difficult questions and choices we're facing. And yes, sometimes we may even discuss something that struck us in the sermon or Bible study.

So it would have been something to listen in on that conversation, to hear the women's remembrances of the one they had followed, even unto his death. I imagine those stories bore testimony of the life they now lived, one that had been unimaginable before their first encounter with Jesus. Perhaps they laughed at a story or two of the Twelves' foibles or recalled some of Jesus' teaching that had shifted something deep within them. "I'd forgotten that," one of them would say.

But one of those dazzling figures at the tomb indicates that there is something that *all* of them, apparently, have forgotten: "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again." Hearing this, they remember.

This Easter, let us revel in the majesty of the music and the words we will hear in our sanctuaries. But let us also listen carefully to the words that are spoken around the table during brunch beforehand or over coffee afterward. In doing so perhaps we will

catch a hint of the aromatic ointment the women made to care for the body of Christ then, as we care for it now.

sean gladding is a storyteller, a pastor, and author of A View from the Margins.