

The tomb was empty. About that there seems to be no doubt. Around 2000 years ago, there was a Jewish man who had a small gathering of followers and who was stirring up trouble for the government of the day with talk of the inherent equality of all people, of peace built upon a just distribution of the earth's resources, of forgiveness and mercy in the face of evil and other such ill-conceived notions. To nip trouble in the bud, he was crucified along with the other criminals of the day. This was the usual way to get rid of such troublemakers then. Most of his followers dispersed, a few women hung around at a distance and finally a rich man, a follower with connections, arranged with the ruler permission to bury the body. He wrapped it respectfully in a clean linen cloth, laid it in his own newly carved-out tomb and rolled a great stone in front of the entrance. He left two poor women sitting by the tomb, mourning their loss. You probably wouldn't be able to get the authorities to admit it, but here this morning we heard that the temple hierarchy, the very ones who made the deal to eliminate the troublesome Jesus, wanted to make sure his prediction was not lived out, "After three days I will be raised." So, they struck another deal with Pilate to seal off Jesus' escape. Just to be sure, the very next morning the ruler ordered two guards to go to the tomb and make it as secure as possible.

The day after that day, Sunday morning, the tomb was empty. Some say there was an earthquake. Some say that the guards fell asleep, and that the disorganized, fearful, scattered group of disciples pulled off a great hoax, silently moved the stone, stole the body and hid it where it would never be found. The women said, "He is risen!"

The problem in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago was that none of the available explanations was very reliable. The first-An earthquake that could roll back a huge stone and toss a body out of the cave never to be found again surely would have been felt far and wide and other damage would have been recorded. However, it does sound like a way to announce a whole new world to me. Haven't we been moved by the dramatic imagery of an ice storm, where nature's great pruning takes place, such that the landscape is transformed and months later we still see the fresh evidence. Just imagine what an earthquake would give us to talk about.

But then Matthew adds that God's angel came down from heaven, and he rolled away the stone. Whoever heard about a hefty muscle-bound angel that could move a huge stone? I thought they just floated on clouds and played their harps all day long.

The second- The testimony of the guards? Everyone knows that guards will say whatever they are told to say, whatever they are paid to say. Reports from any military are suspect.

The third explanation-By women? Their testimony wouldn't be trusted in those days. They were too emotionally involved. Besides they were distraught, they could have been hallucinating. If his disciples did steal the body, surely they would have made up a better story. But the problem was, the tomb was empty.

That is our problem too. We come today, Easter morning and hear again the story of the empty tomb. Our rational, logical mind says, the body was stolen, the story was made up, the resurrection was only a spiritual experience. The tomb can't have been empty. But it was. And 2000 years of witnesses say, "He is risen, he lives!"

Not, he was risen, he lived, but he is risen, he lives. As Paul Knitter says in his book, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, the point of the resurrection is that Jesus "is actually risen and alive in me. If he's not alive in me, which means in us the community, then so what if he stepped forth from the tomb..." The tomb was empty and Jesus lives.

Here we are now facing down a virus that none of us can see with the naked eye. Some have personified it, "We are facing a giant or a beast, one that is not easily slain."

I read this week about Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation, the global body charged with keeping humankind safe by advising health services within the United Nations' system and leading partners in international response. At this time, 3 billion people, more than a third of the world's population are either in partial or complete lockdown. The director-general says, "this coronavirus is presenting us with an unprecedented threat." Yet, "there is hope. There are many things all countries can do. This is an opportunity to come together as one against a common enemy: an enemy against humanity."

I don't know what religion or philosophy Tedros follows, but the more I learn, I find a person who dedicates himself to saving the people he is responsible for. He was raised in Ethiopia. He was the first African to be the top official of WHO and the first not to be a medical doctor. He gained notoriety as a specialist in the study, treatment, and prevention of malaria. As he was given more responsibility, he overhauled Ethiopia's health system and built a female-focused primary-care system that deployed 38,000 community health workers to ease the nation's healthcare shortage. Mother and child mortality rates as well as HIV infections, and malaria and tuberculosis mortality rates were drastically reduced under his watch. His mission to heal the world dates back to childhood. Tedros, was born in Asmara, Eritrea, to an engineer dad and homemaker mom. He was just a boy when his younger brother died at the age of four of what he now suspects was measles. "I didn't accept (his death). I don't accept it even now," he said.

When the family moved north to Tigray, where poverty and malnutrition is rampant, Tedros recalls being "fully cognisant of the needless suffering and death caused by malaria." It set him on a mission to help. He graduated with an undergraduate degree the same year I began ministry, 1986. He obtained numerous

other degrees related to public health. When he first became the WHO chief, a devastating Ebola outbreak had claimed more than 11000 lives in West Africa. Tedros was on the front line when the disease took hold in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He travelled there many times to see the situation of not only government leaders, but common citizens in towns and rural areas.*

Tedros dedicates himself to relate to the marginalized. He is doing what he can to bring the world together to save it. He has been strongly criticized for not condemning China's handling of this crisis, but his diplomacy has kept vital information sharing by long time friends and foes. Dr. Tedros wishes to heal humanity and has dedicated his life's work to it. He does not accept that death is the end. He is living up to the headline, "The Whole World in His Hands."

I believe in a God who can turn the shadow of death into the light of a new day. I believe that suffering and pain are not inevitable but they can be relieved. I believe that all people are created equal and that all people can be treated equally. I believe that there is abundance in our world and that we can share it equitably. I believe that many people insisting on peace can stop the tyrants who want war. I believe that it is more profitable to manufacture equipment for sustainable agriculture than it is to manufacture weapons. I believe that we can turn swords into ploughshares. I believe that our faith will help us live through the war on Covid-19, help us overcome that 'Giant.' I even believe that our secular culture will one day turn again to the truth of the gospel. Now you may say that believing those things makes as much sense as believing that the tomb was empty. But the tomb was empty. So I refuse to believe that we have to accept the status quo. I refuse to believe that we cannot provide safe affordable housing, meaningful employment, healthy food, suitable education and excellent health care for all Canadians, on and off reserves. I refuse to believe that faithful people living according to the way of Christ can't change the world. The tomb was empty. Christ is risen! Whether you believe it or not is not really the most important question. The important question is whether you are prepared to live as if it is so. Amen.

Acknowledging inspiration from Aln Brehm and Brian Stoffregen from textweek.com

*The Whole World in His Hands, COVID-19 News, April 5, 2020

Let us listen to a musical video from a group the McConnell family introduced me to. The group is from Northern Ireland, called the Rend Collective. This group began a few years ago to bring a Christian message of hope in a new way that might unite the nation and bring out the millennial generation to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ for our day! This piece is entitled "Every Giant will Fall"