



The Terror of Easter

“Well... what if Jesus *is* alive?”

James paces the room, running his hand through his hair, shaking his head. The rest of the Twelve are there, too, and they’re contemplating the same thing. Well, not all the Twelve. Judas isn’t there, of course.

Of course.

And Thomas is gone at the moment, but the rest of the Twelve are all there, and they’re all thinking the same thing: What if Jesus *is* alive?

And they’re terrified.

The women came in that morning. “He’s alive! We’ve seen him!”

And of course they didn’t believe them. Peter and John ran out to the tomb and found it empty, but it couldn’t be... could it?

No.

No way.

And then Mary comes back. “I’ve seen him alive!”

No.

No way.

Can’t. Be. True.

And the John came in. Jesus appeared to him! John is overjoyed, but his joy hasn’t leaked to the other disciples.

And now these two disciples from Emmaus are coming in and telling them that Jesus is alive.

Nathaniel shakes his head. “I don’t know. I don’t know!”

And James looks at him. “You know what he’s going to say if he’s alive? ‘Why’d you abandon me? Why’d you leave me behind?’ We’re all cowards! We ran away. We ran away when he needed us. We’re not even brave enough... we’re such cowards we couldn’t even stand with him when he died.”

At that John looks up. He’s about to say something, but James turns away, pacing. He can’t stand still. How can anyone stand still when this is going on?

What if Jesus is alive? What would he say to his students? What would he say to his chosen band of brothers? What would he say?

James could imagine Jesus's disappointed voice, like when they woke him in the middle of the storm – it seemed like forever ago. But he'd have that sad tone. Or maybe it would have that edge of anger, like when he cleared out the temple. "How dare you? I chose you to be my witnesses, and what did you do? You left me to die."

James keeps pacing the room. He checks the door – still locked.

Good.

Last thing we need is the Jews coming in here and crucifying us, too.

And then he was there. Jesus stood in their midst. The disciples recoiled. James braced himself for those words of judgment sure to come from Jesus' mouth. This was his ghost. He was back just to condemn them.

"Peace be with you." Jesus said. "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

And he showed them the scars: the scars he received on the cross. The holes in his hands, his feet, and his side. The wounds he took for them.

James shook his head. He couldn't believe it! It was too amazing!

No! Jesus couldn't be alive! And if he was alive, he couldn't be here to give them – peace?

"Do you have anything here to eat?" Jesus asks.

Well here, Jesus. Have a piece of broiled fish.

And Jesus eats it, smiling all the time.

It's really him. And he's not angry with them. He's bringing them peace!

James shakes his head again and resumes his pacing. How can this be? They don't deserve this! They don't deserve love like this! He doesn't deserve love like this.

Jesus looks up from his meal. "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

And like that, Jesus opens James's mind – and all the other disciples', too. James remembers everything he heard in Synagogue school – but he understands it now. How it's all about Jesus. All about their sin and the fact that God sent someone to suffer for them, in their place. That God didn't make use of his right to demand payment – not from them, but from his Son.

Jesus says, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

James rejoiced. Jesus is alive, and he comes not to bring condemnation, but peace.

Now, brothers and sisters,

We are no better than those disciples. We have abandoned Jesus as well. But he died for your sins, and he still lives to bring you peace with God.

And this story is true.

Luke 24:36-49

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