

## The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey E. Frantz

*Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. (John 20:6-9)*

**Belief is personal.** Always, there's a healthy agnosticism in the best of our Christian faith. I say *healthy* because to doubt certain elements of the Christian story is human. If we take away the doubt completely, it's no longer belief, but something more, like certitude or something that would need proof to achieve respected validity.

The resurrection accounts in the gospels are not facts; they're about faith and a sense of *warming from within* in the human heart. Everywhere, there's mystery and wonder. The empty tomb; the varying experiences of the disciples, like Peter and John in the above reading from John 20.

Part of what this says to us is that *belief is personal*. And because it's personal, we all need to be able to *come to belief* in our own time. For example, in the above account from John, why is it that only John *sees and believes* upon entering the empty tomb? Why not Peter, too?

Immediately, this reveals the different ways people come to faith. At some point, for all of us, in order to believe, the head has to give its assent. It has to say *yes*. Yet, we all have different conduits between our head and our heart or our head and our spirit. For some of us, it's a more immediate happening. For others, it takes more time and sorting out.

Again, belief is personal.

In my own experience, to a considerable extent, I need things to cohere, logically and reasonably, for me to nod my head in affirmation of belief. As much as they can, things need to make sense. And why not?

Still, logic and reason can only take us so far. At some point, we have to let go and entrust the assent of our heart to the larger wonder and mystery of our Creator God. However, the point of *letting go* varies from person to person.

**Everything in its own season.** I stress the matter of belief being *personal* because there are so many people who, unnecessarily, beat themselves up over *right belief*. I refer to folks who wonder *why don't I believe more?* or *why don't I believe this or that?* And people who wonder, obsessively almost, about their prayer life.

These *matters of faith* are personal. There's no right or wrong way of *coming to faith*.

With Easter on the horizon, certainly the high water mark of our Christian faith, making Easter personal and meaningful beyond the usual celebrative worship and reflective experiences of *holy week*, asks something of us. In a sense, we have to give ourselves to the mystery.

The important thing is to jump in and get involved in some of the offerings of the Lenten season. And then open ourselves to the movement of the Spirit. There are no predictable ways that faith comes. It comes ... in its own time and in its own season. But we have to give ourselves to the faith process. And that takes time and a level of commitment.

For all of us, Easter is the glowing affirmation that God has spoken and that, in the aftermath—somehow—everything is different. Indeed, all of reality is cast in a new light. What we thought was dead is somehow not dead at all. To be sure, how can it be dead when we can feel it in our hearts and spirits?

Again and again, Easter celebrates the triumph of love. Love, emanating from the heart of our Creator/ Redeemer God, cannot be contained by the forces of death. Love fills the spirit, lifting us above our every weakness and anxiety, moving us beyond whatever keeps us from our deepest experience of God's purposes.

Whenever and wherever new life comes, Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. And so, along with Peter and John, let us all go and see and believe!