

I'm never ready for Easter Sunday.

I don't mean that in the sense of not having all the right foods in, or the right decorations up. In contrast to Christmas, there's nothing much to it, especially if you don't go big-time on chocolate or gifts. Just because of the time of year that it falls, we have spring flowers to enjoy and the renewal of life in the wider sense, whether we attach any religious significance to it or not.

So, yes, I am certainly ready for the Easter season in the pagan sense: for the daffodils and the crocuses, for the green shoots and the maple buds and the beginnings of new leaves. But I'm never ready for Easter Sunday in church.

The preparations for Holy Week in the church make it the busiest time of the year. Extra services. Extra music. Extra sermons. Extra bulletins. Prepare the palms. Order the flowers. Change the hangings. Strip the altar and take everything cheerful out of the church. Then put it all back and go directly from solemn and funereal to festive and joyful. The Altar Guild gets its biggest workout of the year, and so does the choir. And everyone involved in the preparations needs a week off by Sunday afternoon.

But my real problem with Easter Sunday is that it comes too soon after Good Friday. I'm not finished dealing with the questions that were raised on Thursday and Friday. I'm not finished thinking it through and working my way to an understanding. I always somehow feel that if I had an extra week in there I might be able to figure it out. But I am, of course, trying to make divine action fit inside a human framework, and an extra week isn't going to make any difference.

Whichever gospel version we use, the story of how the disciples learned about and dealt with the resurrection is much the same: they were stunned. They didn't believe it at first. They had a hard time getting their heads around it.

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And we can easily recognize that reaction. Many of the major events that change our lives come as a shock. It would be so much easier to cope if we had time to take things gradually and adjust slowly; to get used to the idea of change, to think things through. But it doesn't often work like that. Life is not a calm intellectual exercise, no matter how much we would like it to be. Great life-changing events don't often give you a time-out while you get ready for them.

Sooner or later we all go through times when life's events suddenly overwhelm us. All at once everything has changed completely and there's no going back, and what we most want to do is to find a quiet place to hide, while we take a long time-out and think it all through. Oh yes. We understand how the disciples felt.

The events of Thursday and Friday had been a terrible shock, but at least they were consistent with past experience. Even if they hadn't been there, none of them would have had any trouble believing that Jesus had been arrested, condemned and executed. It happened all the time. Only a few weeks earlier, Pilate had condemned 200 people, who might possibly have been thinking rebellious thoughts, to crucifixion. That kind of cruelty and barbarism happened all the time in their world – just as it does in ours.

But while they were still reeling from that shock, followed by the trial and the crucifixion, the disciples faced another shock – one that was much harder to grasp. They could more or less understand what had happened on Thursday and Friday, because at least it was familiar, but this new shock was a bit more of a stretch: Jesus was alive.

The disciples didn't immediately throw open the windows and shout the news to the whole world. They didn't throw a party and celebrate. They didn't run through the streets singing. They kept very quiet and locked themselves in a room, trying to figure it out and get their heads around it.

When they had finally DID get their heads around it, and put together enough evidence to

convince themselves that it wasn't all a mistake, there would be no shutting them up! They would be willing to face any kind of punishment rather than stop talking about it. These simple and unsophisticated people would devote the rest of their lives to spreading the word to the whole world, and willingly go to their deaths for it. In a while their actions and every part of their lives would be the most convincing evidence that what they said was true.

On Easter Sunday, we sing triumphal hymns and celebrate. We go straight from the sorrow of Friday and the shock and fear, straight into victory songs. But the disciples didn't. They were huddled together trying to cope with what on earth was happening now. And they'll still be there next Sunday when we meet again. They weren't ready for Easter Sunday either.

Fortunately, there's no rush. There was no rush for them, and there's none for us. After all, we commemorate Easter Sunday EVERY Sunday, and the more we let the truth of it soak into our very being, the more we, like them, will show it in our lives and actions. Hallelujah! Christ is risen!