

Year C*Easter 10:10*2010*A Place By Itself
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Rough Draft

Of all the great, earthshaking, time-warping, reality-transforming events of this Glad Morning the thing that has caught my eye is that napkin Peter saw, folded, and set apart.

Then Simon Peter came, following John, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.¹

In all the wonder and for a moment, the horror, of that stupendous moment Simon Peter notices the **cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.**

And I imagined Jesus on the morning of the resurrection. . . oh it's so unimaginable. . . but I imagined it anyway. . .you'll have to forgive me.

I imagined him resurrecting through the graves cloths, whatever that could possibly mean, through the mummy-like wrappings, standing up naked and whole. . .but with a towel over his face. . . thinking. . . "I can't see a thing!"

Maybe then realizing something was happening to him.
Maybe realizing "Oh my God! I was crucified. But now I am alive!"
"Why can't I see?"
"OH, there's a towel on my head."

Then remembering some kind hands, maybe Mary Magdalene,
maybe Joseph of Arimathea,
maybe his mother.
But he remembers loving hands, covering his dead face.

So with tenderness he takes the cloth from his face,
folds it over, then over again,
and places it in a place by itself.

Then, he leaves the tomb.

And that's the way Magdalene, Peter and John find it later in the morning.

I'm sorry. As soon as we try to imagine it the resurrection gets wooden, or smoozy, but inside it feels powerful, clear, and real to me.

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 20:6-7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

I new many others must have noticed the cloth, thought about it, and maybe looked into it. . .so I went ONLINE.

And I found a story.
This story is all over the internet.
I don't know who to credit or blame for it.
It's ubiquitous.

This is how it goes.
Why did Jesus fold the linen burial cloth?
Was it important?
Is it really significant?"

In order to understand the significance of the folded napkin, you need to understand a little bit about Hebrew tradition of that day. The folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant, and every Jewish boy knew this tradition.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it.

The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating, and the servant would not dare touch that table, until the master was finished.

Now, if the master was done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard, and would wad up the napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table. For in those days, the wadded up napkin meant, "I'm done."

But, if the master got up from the table, and folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table, because the folded napkin meant, "I'm coming back."

I thought that was a dear story.

Another commentator said this:

–The Resurrection was first generated conceived in the unfathomable, impenetrable mystery, of the mind of God. The resurrection of Jesus occurred beyond our world, first. The bond of Father to Son, Son to Father, reknit itself after 3 days, and an eternity, of death. Then, flesh, holy flesh, lived; a new body, a new Self. Jesus stretched new sinews in the dark, cool, tomb-and all the hosts of heaven simply shouted in victory!

What was the first action of Jesus on that Easter morning? The first thing Jesus did was to make his bed. (The Rev. George Yandell, *He is Risen!*)

As I cruised the internet researching the folded cloth I noticed how often people were speaking of evidence for the resurrection, or proof for the resurrection. That wasn't what I was looking for. I wanted the poetry of the resurrection. I don't think we can ever prove what happened on the third day. We can only believe in it, celebrate it, sing it, and live it.

I never again want to minimize the importance of the day Jesus was raised from the dead. It is looming larger and larger in my belief. The actual appearances of Jesus to Mary, Peter, the eleven, are monumental but so hard to describe. Sometimes he's recognized sometimes he's not. Sometimes he can be touched and sometimes he cannot. Perhaps the appearances were so far beyond what anyone could ever put into words they will always leave us stunned and speechless. We may need something smaller to contain the power and the glory of the Lord's resurrection.

So I wonder maybe God gave us some little things, little experiences, little signs, of the glory of the Third Day, for those of us who could not be there.

When I was a boy my mother took us to Church every Sunday. My dad went golfing. When Church was over we would go over to the Country Club, sit outside on the patio and have lunch. Those were the best burgers and fries and coke in the world. One of the things that made them so good was that we were waiting and watching for my dad.

The patio overlooked the long sweeping par five eighteenth hole.

Off in the distance you could see the next foursome come over the bridge spanning Butterfield Creek. In those days everyone walked around the golf course. I would strain my eyes to see my dad. It was so fun to be the first to see him. When it was him it was unmistakable. My dad walked in a funny way. He did not swing his arms straight. He swung his left arm straight across his body. You could see him walking a mile off.

I imagine, when I die, if it is allowed, I imagine the way I'll know my dad is when I see, far off, a man walking towards me, swinging his left arm, across his body.

I wonder if Jesus folded the napkin and set it in a place by itself because he knew that would be a real, tangible, oddly memorable, thing that would stay with and work on Mary, Peter, and John for the rest of their lives.

When you love someone enough to want to be with them for a lifetime, or forever, very little things hold can enormous amounts of that love.

If, when I die, again only if it is a good thing, if I see a Paper Mache Tyrannosaurus Rex
I'll know Grandma Pearl is all right.

If I see a lady, ironically, with a paper, party, napkin on her head, it will be grandma
McLean.

If I see a tennis ball, it won't be long before a Cocker Spaniel named Toby shows up.
And if I see a napkin folded up and set carefully in a place all by itself I'll know the
whole universe will be okay.

In the end the Resurrection of Jesus may be about very small things that carry enormous
power.

It may be about a loaf of bread and a little wine, taken, broken, poured, and shared,
or a kindness shown at the time of trial,
or a conviction held when no one is listening to you,
a slobbery tennis ball.
the way a man walks,
or a folded napkin.

They are little things which contain the enormity of a world redeemed.