

Full is good. Empty is bad. That's what we've always been told.

Full sounds positive; empty sounds negative.

Empty implies want and need. Full suggests abundance and blessing.

Yet, the Easter message today is for empty people, not full people.

If I were to take a poll and ask the question, "Which would you rather be: full or empty?" most of us would probably say, "Full, right?" Full is good!

Full Easter Eggs! Good!

Full church on Sunday! That's good.

Children full of respect and manners! Good.

A home full of comfortable furniture! Good.

A marriage full of laughter and love! Good and very good.

A full stomach! Good.

A full bank account! Good.

A full pantry! Good.

A full gas tank! Good but, expensive today.

You get the point. A person who is "full" is one who's able to look at his or her life and say, "Every need is met; every fear silenced; and every obstacle overcome." We say to ourselves, "That's what I want."

Perhaps we are people who are "Full."

But on this Easter morning, if we believe that we're full, that our lives don't need anything else, then this day, this message, this reality of the resurrected Jesus Christ may not be for us.

Easter isn't for full people. It isn't for the "have-it-all-together, life-is-good" people.

No, Easter is for empty people. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is for those who've figured out that in this life, "full" is a fleeting feeling.

One analysis of the spending habits of American families reveals that the vast majority of income is spent on items that need constant replenishing. We spend almost all of our treasure on food that will be eaten, gas that will be burned, clothes that will wear out and entertainment that lasts a short while.

No matter how much we eat today, come Monday morning, we'll be hungry again. We know that on this side of eternity the beauty of spring always fades, turning into a bristling hot summer.

We have felt the **emptiness** of losing someone close. Others know what it's like to have their health fading or their family fighting. We've had:

- Prayers unanswered,
- Haunting fears,
- Lingering health issues,
- Stagnant faith life,

- Hurting, broken relationships,
- Uncertain futures.

We know that fullness is fleeting. We know what it feels like to be empty.

The good news is that Easter is not for full people.

Easter is for empty people.

In today's scripture we move from one action to another, from one emotion to another emotion, from one character, Mary Magdalene, to Peter, then John, then two angels, and finally to Jesus, then back again to Mary and the disciples. This is an Easter journey.

Mary arrived, in the dark. I wonder how Mary walked that journey to the tomb along a darkened path. Her head down watching to ensure she didn't step on a rock -- Memories flooding her mind... emotionally spent..., empty, a heart sad and tender for the loss of Jesus. Yet, she approached the tomb – in darkness, fear and trembling. She was grieving.

Mary didn't look in – according to scripture, unless you think her curiosity got the best of her. If we approached Jesus' tomb, if we saw the stone rolled away, we'd be curious about what's happened. Maybe **Mary looked in** - a glance, a quick look... afraid of what she might see.

Then, Mary ran to get Peter and John. Mary, bent with grief, hesitating to look in the tomb, in utter disbelief of what she's found; now running, running. I

wonder how far she ran. I wonder how far we would run to tell someone Jesus is missing! Mary speaks to Peter, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him.”

It is comforting to know where our loved ones are resting. We want to be able to memorialize them in a final resting place so that we, who are left, can go there to remember, for our relief, for our comfort.

Peter and John also ran, running to the tomb – they have similar reactions to its emptiness. They are curious, yet worried. Something has happened!

John looked in, but didn’t go in.

Peter looked in – went in – then John went in too.

One saw and believed but said nothing. Neither understood; they were confused. They looked in the tomb and found nothing but the grave clothes. I hear them talking to each other, “What happened here? In utter disbelief and silence they go home. Home is where we seek refuge. We want to be home when we don’t feel right, when we’re suffering. Peter and John went home.

Empty is empty! It’s not pretty. It’s a harsh reality – do I accept the emptiness of the tomb? Do I believe in a risen Lord or do I look elsewhere for fulfillment? That’s our Easter question.

Mary followed Peter and John to the tomb. She stands there dumbstruck, “weeping!” She doesn’t leave the tomb. She doesn’t go home. This is her place to grieve. This is where they had laid Jesus.

Now, she looks in the tomb. She sees two angels in white. The angels ask her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

You’re kidding me! It’s obvious! I can’t find my lord. I can’t find the one I love, the one I’ve followed. We cry because we love – we cry when our loved ones are hurting, suffering, or when death occurs—our hearts break for others we care about. Crying is normal “grief” behavior. Mary was crying, weeping! Mary thought Jesus was taken away from her – lost forever. “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

Mary stays by the tomb. She can’t pull herself away. Isn’t this where her Lord should be? Once while I was a chaplain in St. Louis I did a funeral for a husband and two sons who lost their mother. At the conclusion of the graveside service, these two brothers, mid-30’s, sat in the front row, and slumped in their chairs, staring blankly at their mother’s casket. They were so overcome by their grief they couldn’t move. We waited and we waited and we waited. Finally, the funeral director drove me back to the funeral home and said, “They need more time.”

That’s my image for Mary. She won’t leave the tomb. She needs more time.

But Mary turns around, “And sees Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus.” Sometimes things in plain sight just aren’t that easy to see. We miss the obvious, that which is right in front of our face.

Jesus speaks, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for?” “You’re kidding me? First the two angels ask me why I am crying and now you, the gardener. Do you not know what has happened? Where’s Jesus?”

Sometimes in life, we’re just overcome with grief, the tears and emotions spill out. We cry out in anguish. We get angry, overcome by emotional outbursts. We stay silent, holding all that grief inside, going home, being alone, and isolating ourselves from others.

Jesus says to Mary what Jesus says to you and me. He calls us by name. The scene changes dramatically. Mary turned toward him, “Rabboni.”

Now, Mary recognizes Jesus but Jesus gives her a tough lesson, “**Do not hold on to me**, for I have not yet returned/ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I’m returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Don’t look for me here. Look to the Father! Look to Heaven! Look up and know that the Son of God has risen. **Look up and believe!**

When we look up and believe in a risen Jesus, we see the good in others; we find the positive; our faith leads us to care for one another.

When we look up and believe in a risen Christ, we know that the events of today are not the end of our story. Our stories are continually being written.

Mary's story continued – so did the disciples' stories.

When we look up and believe in a risen Savior, we are being faithful to his teachings – faithful in our attitude and faithful in our behavior.

When we look up and believe in the risen Christ, we live as he lived – loving, sharing, and serving.

When we follow a risen Christ, it means that we have hope, even while suffering through despair or sorrow.

Each Easter we are faced with the realization that the tomb is empty. “We don't know where they have put him!” We come to the tomb running excitedly or in fear; we look in, go in or run away because of the emptiness. We weep and we cry in the griefs we bear. We go home either bewildered or believing.

Let us look up and believe, believing in a Risen Jesus, a risen Savior!

Hallelujah! Amen.