

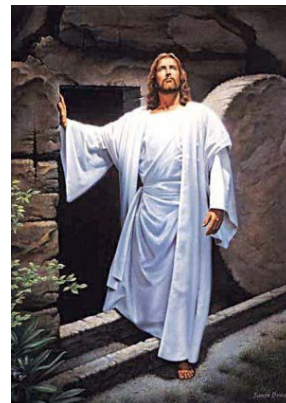
Easter Sunday

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning and saw the stone removed from the tomb.

John 20, 1-9

“Why are you looking for the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised up.”

Luke 24, 1-12



Orel and Marya are best friends. They are both eight years old and have been living next-door to one another for almost a year now. They are patients in Jerusalem's Alyn Hospital, victims of the violence that has raged in their homeland for generations. What makes their simple friendship special is this: Orel is an Israeli Jew, severely wounded by a Hamas rocket and Marya a Palestinian Muslim from Gaza, paralysed by an Israeli missile. Someone forgot to tell them that they are enemies.

When Orel arrived at the hospital a year ago, he could not hear, see, talk or walk. Now he does them all haltingly. Half his brain is gone. Doctors were deeply pessimistic about his survival. Today they are amazed at his progress, though unclear how much more can be made. Marya's spinal cord was broken at the neck and she can move only her head. Smart, sunny and strong-willed, she moves her wheelchair by pushing a button with her chin. Nothing escapes her gaze. She knows that Orel is starting to prefer boys as playmates and she makes room. But the bond between them still remains strong. Neither child understands the prolonged fight over land and identity that so divides the people of the region. Marya and Orel are kids, so they play.

But for those who have spent time in the children's presence, it is even more powerful to observe their parents who do understand. They have developed a friendship that defies national struggle.

“The wounds of our children, their pain, our pain, have connected us,” said Orel's mother, Angela Elizarov, as she sat on a bed in the room she shares with her son. Next door is Marya, her six-year-old brother Momen, and their father Hamdi Aman. “Does it matter that he is from Gaza and I am from Beersheba, that he is an Arab and I am a Jew? It has no meaning to us. He sees my child and I see his child.”

Volunteers who help at the hospital are often religious Jews on national service. Some ask Hamdi Aman how he can live among the people whose army killed his wife, his mother and his eldest son in the same attack in which Marya was so badly injured.

“I have never felt there was a difference among people - Jews, Muslims, Christians - we are all human beings. I worked in Israel for years and so did my father. We know that it is not about what you are but who you are. And that is what I have taught my children.” Hamdi Aman helps with Orel's therapy and is an inspiration to volunteers and hospital staff alike. Angela Elizarov notes that in places like Alyn Hospital political tensions just don't exist, and asks: “Do we need to suffer in order to learn that there is no difference between Jews and Arabs?” (from *A Mideast Bond, Stitched of Pain and Healing* by Ethan Bronner)

Such a simple expression of love and understanding holds the true meaning of Resurrection. Hope triumphs and love lives in this friendship between two broken children, and the consequent friendship between their parents. Such friendships defy

old hatreds and fly in the face of evil. They are a sure sign that the kingdom of God is here and now. Resurrection occurs in our midst in every such small, simple, hidden event. What we celebrate this Sunday will have its true impact only to the extent that we reach out to those around us in compassion, generosity, humility and selflessness.

As we read today's gospel from John, it is worth noting how differently the three principal characters react to the news that Jesus has been raised from death. The Jews of the time believed that the spirit of a dead person hovered over the grave for three days after burial. Mary Magdalen was simply following Jewish tradition by setting out to visit the tomb of Jesus within this three-day period. When she discovered that the stone at the tomb entrance had been rolled aside, she ran to tell Peter and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved." And they all had different reactions. Mary was concerned that Jesus' body had been stolen. Peter took in the scene and said absolutely nothing. Was he in a state of disbelief or confusion? The "other disciple" took one look at the evidence and believed. In John's Gospel, it is this "other disciple" who is held up to us as *the* model of fidelity and faith.

John's account of the Resurrection puts the focus on the empty tomb. From the time of the early Church, the Easter Egg has been a symbol of the empty tomb and resurrection. New life comes only when the egg is shattered. In the shattering of the tomb of Jesus, God brought new life and hope to a broken world.

This Easter Sunday, we are invited by the gospel to stand with Mary and Peter and John at the entrance of the shattered tomb and to ponder the significance of it all. One of the central messages for us is that we, too, are being invited to break out of our narrow little worlds and the pettiness that often confines us and to create a new world whose distinctive characteristics are peace and justice and compassion and big-mindedness. The Resurrection is God's definitive statement that everything that Jesus said and did and lived has been vindicated. Easter has its full impact only when we come alive and continue the revolution that Jesus began.