

But you don't have to take my word for it

I knew it was going to be a good day when the TV cart was in the corner. When the TV cart was in the corner of my first-grade classroom, it meant that, after lunch, we got to watch *Reading Rainbow*. *Reading Rainbow*, hosted by LeVar Burton, was an educational show in the 80s and 90s that encouraged children to explore new worlds and people through reading. Each episode centered on a theme from a book, or other children's literature, which was explored through a number of segments or stories. And each episode ended with recommendations *from other kids* for books to check out from your local library. Those recommendations given by the kids were introduced by LeVar Burton's famous line, "But you don't have to take my word for it."

You see, the creators of the show knew what we all know--we don't always believe someone when they tell us something, especially if we don't trust them. On the contrary, we are much more likely to believe someone if we can relate to them or we share something in common with them. LeVar Burton was great, but he was still an *adult*. When another *kid* says that a book is worth checking out, first-graders listen.

Sadly, that's what's going on in our Easter gospel today. The male disciples did not believe the female disciples (because that's what they were) who came back from the tomb with this amazing news. They thought they were telling an idle tale and latent sexism was certainly a prominent factor in

their disbelief. And yet, how could it possibly be true that their beloved rabbi--who in the past three days had been arrested, tried, crucified, and buried-- how could he be alive today? So Peter *doesn't* take their word for it. Because even if we *do* trust someone, we are still more likely to trust our *own* experience of something. So, he runs to the tomb himself. Stooping and looking in, he sees the linen cloths by themselves and then goes home, amazed at what had happened.

Fast forward to our reading from Acts, and we find Peter proclaiming a message of God's universal love for all people through Jesus Christ. How did this happen? How did Peter go from following Jesus, to denying him, to not believing the women, to proclaiming God universal's love and forgiveness in Jesus? Because he came to believe that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are God's ultimate way of showing us how much God loves us. God became a human being in Jesus Christ so that through his life, death, and resurrection we didn't have to take anyone else's word for it. We can see in God's own Son--the Word made flesh--that sin and death do not have the last word but that mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional love are God's final word.

Now, Luke's gospel does not go on to tell us that Peter apologized to the women for not believing them (that would have been nice). But it does go on to tell us about two more disciples who had an encounter with the Risen Jesus that same Easter Day. These disciples aren't perplexed or amazed at the empty tomb. Instead, they are distressed as they head home from Jerusalem, sad about everything that had happened there. On the way, they strike up a

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conversation with a stranger who tells them all about God's plan of saving grace in the scriptures. After the conversation, they invite him to join them for dinner and to their surprise find that this stranger had been Jesus the whole time! "Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us on the way?" they say.

This is the Easter story that I relate to more. None of us will share the experience of being at the empty tomb, like the women first, and then Peter. But has not your heart burned within you? I know mine has. Like when I have a heart to heart with someone I care about. Or like when I help someone who is in need. Or like when I let go of pretending I have everything together, I ask for help, and I let God's love and grace fill and comfort me. These are just some of the ways I know I have experienced God's love and forgiveness--God's final word of unconditional love in my life.

But you don't have to take my word for it!

Take a look, it's in a book, God loves you. Take a look, it's in bread and wine, God loves you. Take a look, it's in a friend, in nature, in serving others, and in so much more--God loves you, God loves you, God loves you.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!