

***Oak Meadow
United Methodist Church***

*2740 Hunters Green
San Antonio, Texas 78231
(210) 492-3902*

<http://www.oakmeadowumc.org/>

Pastor Larry Scharmann

Laity Notes

*by
Chuck Hall*

March 27, 2005 – Number 26

SOMETHING WILL COME OF THIS

As I gave her a hug of thanks and turned to leave, she said with great confidence: "something will come of this." It was late in the afternoon on February 3, 2004 and since December 14, 2003, when the PPRC met to parcel out a list of church contacts, we had seriously been seeking a pianist for our church. Anna Cram wanted to shift from the piano to the choir and we needed someone new behind the piano. We were having little luck in our search. What few leads had been turned up turned out to be dead ends. The task was proving to be difficult with little promise in site.

With this on my mind as I drove to church, I decided to stop by the Jewish Community Center. When I asked about a pianist I was directed to a room on the second floor and there I met Rozalia Ravitsky. I explained our situation and the difficulty we were experiencing. She graciously listened and then told me that she had a brother who might be able to help. She said that she would first speak with him and then call me the next day with his telephone number. And on my way out she said: "Something will come of this."

The next afternoon she called and gave me the telephone number of her brother, Arkadiy Grinman. I called Arkadiy that evening and he said, "I think that I can do this," and agreed to visit our church the following Sunday. After church that Sunday he agreed to play the piano

both for choir practice on the coming Wednesday and for church services on the following Sunday. On February 15th Arkadiy played for the first time before our congregation and he has since been our church pianist. Something indeed had come of this. Arkadiy had become our pianist.

More came on March 28, 2004 when we celebrated Anna's years of service and her retirement as pianist at a church luncheon following worship. Our congregation gathered to thank Anna properly for her grand contribution to our church during a time of great need.

Still more came on January 16, 2005 when we held a second celebration after worship, this time to thank Dottie Burkett for her years of service as our church Choir Director. Our congregation gathered to thank Dottie properly for her grand contribution to our church during a time of great need. And as Dottie shifted from Choir Director to the congregation, Arkadiy became our Choir Director as well as our pianist.

Rozalia's prophecy continues and at still another congregation meal after worship service, this time on March 13th, we celebrated in our own fashion the marriage of Arkadiy and Diana that had been held earlier in Mexico City. None of us were able to attend their Mexico City wedding, but many of us were able to join in our later celebration. This time we watched newlyweds unwrap a large stack of wedding presents in the presence of our congregation. And what a delightful sight that was to watch their newness together in combination with the outpouring of love from our congregation.

Our Long-Range Planning Committee has been working on ideas for a church advertisement to encourage new people to our church. Though not officially a slogan of this campaign, we have given much attention to the idea that "small does not mean less." Surely these events illustrate that fact. We are a small church, but if God can be heard in a "still small voice," certainly he can be worshipped properly among a small gathering of faithful folks. One way we worship God is by minding carefully to those among us.

Thank you Rozalia Ravitsky for you gracious hospitality, for your brother Arkadiy, and for your profound prophecy: "something will come of this!" Much has already come, and may there be even more in the future.

THE EMPTY TOMB

Scholars generally believe that Paul's account in *1 Corinthians* 5:3-7 is the earliest form of the gospel tradition that has come to us.

"[3] I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles."

Both the empty tomb and the witness of women are absent from Paul's account. For the stories of the empty tomb, we must turn to the more expanded versions found in the Gospels. I use the term "versions" advisedly because the Gospel accounts are not carbon copies of each other and their separate accounts remind us that while the Bible is God's revelation it was written by man. Efforts to harmonize these differences, beginning in the 2nd century with Tatian, have been successfully resisted by the Church.

The empty tomb is critical both as an ending and as a beginning. It marked the death of Jesus of Nazareth as an ending. The Gospels are adamant about the death of Jesus because from the time of the cross there have been those who resisted this basic fact and have sought explanations along the lines of a spiritual Jesus or in the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul. For Christianity, Jesus died and was buried and a huge stone was used to close his tomb. The resurrection was a resurrection of the dead. The risen Christ is the Jesus who died.

By itself the empty tomb said only that the body of Jesus was gone, but when linked to the witness of those who saw the risen Christ, it becomes the beginning of the Christian proclamation. It is this witness of the empty tomb and the risen Christ that we are invited to believe. This combination is the foundation stone of Christianity.

Mark 16, *Matthew* 28, *Luke* 24 and *John* 20 include the story of the empty tomb. With the exception of *John* 20, all are the last chapter of their particular Gospel. In each story women are the first to discover the empty tomb and only

Mary Magdalene is named in each of the four Gospels. The stone blocking entrance to the tomb had been rolled back by the time the women arrived; the means by which it was rolled back differ.

The story is anything but smooth, and there is a sense of confusion, disturbance and doubt surrounding all accounts. The text makes no effort to hide this. In Luke's account, when the women who discovered the empty tomb told their story to the disciples, their words to the disciples "seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." (24:11) These men were not casual witnesses, they were the very men who had followed Jesus of Nazareth from the time he had called them.

We might with profit pause this Easter Sunday and read these Gospel accounts. We might read the text and ponder what it says. It might be a good thing to refresh our memories with a translation of the original text. Surely an awesome God periodically deserves some awe. Perhaps a touch of confusion, disturbance and doubt would not be entirely out of place today. If this was the reaction of the first hearers of this story, of the men who had walked side by side with Jesus, then why should it be so easy to accept today? If Easter is too easily celebrated are we in fact paying it due attention?

Luke 24:11 "reminds all of us," writes Fred Craddock in his commentary on Luke, "who celebrate Easter so easily what a burden the resurrection of the dead places on faith, even among those close to Jesus." (p. 283) Easter is not an easy celebration not least because of the burden it places on faith.

Perhaps I am only preaching to myself, and if that is the case then that is fine. I can use all the preaching I can get. But if by chance there are any others like me, then perhaps this Easter might be celebrated with an extra touch of reverence and of awe. And perhaps I might not be the only one to find the time and take the effort to read about the first Easter. Surely that is not too great a task on this the holiest day of our year.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please email comments or suggestions to cjhall_45@yahoo.com or leave a telephone message at 404-1894.