



## Fact or Fiction

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“The rays danced the final steps of a languid tango for the Alphabet House’s very last stimulant.” I read it again. And again. I focused on each word of this concluding sentence from the novel *The Alphabet House*, by Jussi Adler-Olsen, as if seeking the meaning of each word individually might give a clue to the meaning of the whole. I couldn’t figure it out. I’d spent weeks reading this novel, with its action, intrigue, deception, and restoration. Rather than a gradual wrap-up to the end of the novel, the author leaves our protagonist standing on a literal precipice overlooking the sea, contemplating his relationship with a wounded friend. Then this. A sentence that does me no good.

My mom doesn’t read fiction. “Why would I want to read about something that isn’t real?” she’s queried me. Maybe she’d already read too many books about dancing rays and languid tangos.

This brings us, of course, to the resurrection story. Were it a work of fiction, it would have all the right elements: action, intrigue, deception, and restoration. We can savor each word and image. We mentally picture the empty tomb, the large stone, and the dazzling angel. We feel the grief and confusion of the women. Our protagonist dies – no ambiguity about that – but then, a plot twist! He lives!

It’s that element that makes this story most like fiction. The resurrection defies logic. It tortures our common sense. You and I will never have the medical proof to convince a skeptic of the resurrection. Even the disciples didn’t believe it when the women told them what they’d seen and heard at the tomb.

With credit to Rev. Chris Davis of North Shore Presbyterian Church who preached this message on Easter Sunday, we often ask people to accept on faith the resurrection as an essential part of what it means to be Christian, and it can be a stumbling block. Because the proof will never be solid enough to erase doubts, we must offer instead the example of Peter. Despite hearing this “idle tale” from the women, he ran to the tomb. “[S]tooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.” (Luke 24:12 NRSV). Peter had to experience the empty tomb himself. It was not enough to hear the resurrection story from the women. He needed to experience it firsthand, and from that experience, Peter left amazed.

In the same fashion, Thomas had to meet the risen Christ and feel his wounds before he could believe. (John 20:24-29).

Unlike a disappointing conclusion that leaves the reader wondering, this story leaves no doubt about our protagonist. From the precipice, Jesus faces death and overcomes it.

The resilience of the resurrection story is not due to its action, intrigue, deception, and restoration, nor even its shocking plot twist, which we might hope to find in any good novel. It lasts because we each have the opportunity to experience the empty tomb for ourselves. We, his wounded friends, can enter into this Living Word by running breathlessly to the tomb to see for ourselves. Though different for each of us, that experience of grief, surprise, wonder, and grace assures us that we are not playing out a fictional tale. We are sharing in a deep truth told and lived throughout the ages. Then, in our personal experience of the death, burial, and resurrection, we can indeed exclaim for joy, “Alleluia! He is not here; he has risen!”