

Matthew 28:1-10

The Things Above

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,” begins the old hymn, “Look full in his wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim; in the light of his glory and grace.”

“Since, then you have been raised with Christ, Paul begins the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, “set your minds on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

Thus Paul acknowledges the distinction between the earthly things and the things above. Easter is above. There is no better time than Easter to contemplate this distinction and rest our minds on heavenly things.

Today is not the day to think of earthly things, when I first prepared this message, just for effect, I listed several of the more pre-eminent characteristics of life here below. But I decided later not to even mention them. We all speak of the them on other days, and I mention them every other Sunday, but they are not what today is about.

Today is about Resurrection and all the things that point to it:

Rainbows

A clean bill of health

Birth

Being warm and safe and dry and full

Love and Friendship

Cleanliness

Forgiveness

Happy tears

A good sleep

Generosity

Honesty

Peace

One might object that these are all parts of earthly life, even though we think highly of them because they are positive. And that is true, but I mention them here today because they are not merely earthly things, but parts of our experience here below that are blessed, that compel us toward joy and serve as signs that point to heavenly things. These things are not necessary, and if there was justice we would not know them. We are not owed, we do not deserve them.

But we are blessed by them, and since we have been raised with Christ, let us start there, setting our minds on them as on the things above.

Easter

Easter is named after the rising of the sun, which is an “above” thing. Each day we are renewed by it. It is a gift, just like the story of that first Easter morning, which is as surprising as anything.

In the early morning, the women, concerned about proper burial etiquette, which is an earthly concern, made their way to the tomb where Jesus had been laid only to find that the stone covering the entrance had been moved, and an angel dressed like lightning with a “too good to be true” message.

“You are looking for Jesus, he is not here; he has risen, just like he said.” If we weren't so used to it, it would take us by surprise and make us speechless. “Now be on your way,” because resurrections are like that; there is no need to stand still when there has been a resurrection. “Go to Galilee and tell the others.”

The story preaches itself and begs to be sung as well as spoken. It needs a symphony to go with it and symphonies have been inspired by it. It is heavenly and we are healthy and good and right to think about its meaning.

Life Over Death

Part of what it means is the victory of life over death. This is perhaps the most obvious. I have already decided not to talk about death today because it is a tragic part of this “down here below” life. The resurrection is the opposite.

The resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today means our resurrection. Though for some the resurrection is more of a hope than a reality, it is a blessed hope, that sustains us and carries throughout our days. It is part of what Easter means.

Good Over Evil

Another part of what Easter means is the victory of Good over Evil. I don't want to say very much about Evil today because it also is part of this “down below” life and this isn't the time for it.

We all speak of it at other times and I mention it one way or another in every other sermon, we thought of it on Thursday and Friday of this past week. Easter is the opposite of all that.

Today we celebrate the universal human dream of the triumph of goodness and righteousness and justice. The triumph of mercy over judgment. We are enlivened

by the hope that is in Christ Jesus, because in Christ, not only does life conquer death, but good defeats evil. That is part of what Easter means. Set your mind on it. If you are having trouble, start with one of the little earthly victories like the ones I mentioned earlier and let it grow from there.

Meaning Over Meaninglessness

We live in an age of meaning, in which many people, including many of our best play writes and poets and musicians, and even some of us, are not very motivated by the thought of eternal life or possibly not even the idea of the forgiveness of sin, but are more deeply concerned by the idea of life as a quest for meaning. For people like that, fulfilling relationships, meaningful work, living to a purpose, are the best expressions of life's end.

We do well to say boldly that the resurrection of Jesus means the victory of fullness over emptiness, joy over sorrow, the victory of hope over despair; it is the victory of meaning.

How does meaning win? The power of the cross and resurrection is in their vicarious nature, that is, they are for someone. They are not selfish, but self-giving. They can be understood in the context of a relationship characterized by love, one person doing something for

someone else, Jesus doing something for his friends, God doing something for all of us. That is the victory of meaning. That is part of what Easter is about.

Life and goodness and meaning, these are the things from above, we have been taught to set our minds on them. They run contrary to earthly things but we are assured of their truthfulness and victory. They are what Easter is about.

So let us rejoice, we celebrate the victory won when Jesus climbed up from the grave with the marks of his suffering still fresh on his frame, when that angel dressed like lightning gave forth its astonishing message, "He is not here, he has risen, now be on your way to Galilee and tell the others."

And away they went, and away we all go with the magnificent things above set on our minds, and on the tip of our tongues; the earthly things strangely dim.

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