

Luke 24:1-12
April 21, 2019

Easter

The thing about Easter is the simplicity of the way it is told. Unlike the creation stories in Genesis or the wonderful narratives about the patriarchs or the terrible pronouncements of the prophets or the lyrical brilliance of the psalms, all of which are very artfully told with excellent narrative prose or even poetry, the Easter story is just told. There is no “Hallelujah Chorus,” to accompany it.

“He is not here, he has risen,” the messengers at the tomb said to the women who had come to make sure the body of Jesus had been properly prepared for burial. They went back to the eleven disciples to tell the unbelievable news. The text says they were not believed.

There is a down-to-earth matter-of-factness to the telling of the story. It seems understated. But then, upon reflection, how could one fail to understate something like a resurrection. It was Peter who was curious enough to go check it out, wondering to himself what had happened.

Aren't we all wondering what happened? The detail we want, how did life come back into the lifeless body, is not available to us. All we can know is *that* it did. And then we, like all followers of Christ always have been, are left wondering over its meaning. What to do?

The Meaning

It is simple enough to say that the resurrection of Jesus stands for the victory of life over death, mercy over judgment, hope over despair, meaningfulness over emptiness. But these phrases use words that pale before the reality they attempt to describe. Words only go so far and sometimes fall on deaf ears.

I am reminded of the initial response of Joseph's brothers when he finally made himself known to them. They were not able to understand his words. “Come near to me,” he said, and then he repeated to them the story as they tried to process the news that was so good no celebration could match the moment and as their minds tried to wrap around the meaning Joseph was trying to convey to them.

“He is not here . . .” the messengers dressed in lightning said, “why do you look for the living among the dead?” It is a simple statement.

Metaphors

There is no symbolic meaning here. Perhaps that is why the Cross and not the empty tomb is the universal symbol of the Christian faith. Easter does *not* refer metaphorically to the way we keep people alive in our memories, or to the lasting impact of a person's life carried on by the people who believed in their message, or even to the faith they inspire.

It refers to this one astonishingly simple statement of truth, that the one who died is no longer dead, but alive. The word “resurrection” means, “to stand up again,” but it fails as a metaphor. It does not stand for something. It is something. *It is* the thing it stands for.

The question is, what are we to do? It can't be dismissed as if nothing has happened. One must say something about this? There must be a response.

The first thing is to *believe* it. Faith might be the biggest hurdle. It is the central miracle of the Christian faith after which all the others follow. It is one of those things in life one must believe in to see.

The second thing is to celebrate it. That is what Easter Sunday is, a celebration. The sunrise services and the Easter egg hunts; the family gatherings, and glorious services at which the Hallelujah Chorus is sung, or whatever the congregation is up to. It is a happy day and we should be happy no matter what there is to be sad about. Believe and celebrate, that is what we should do, and perhaps that is enough for the day.

Celebration

I myself am pretty bad at celebrations. I don't shout much, and never dance, and I am one of those that if I did shout and dance it would call forth admonitions to stop, please stop. But there are many ways to celebrate and maybe one way is just to take one day off from mourning and complaining and grudging, or just laboring, and let yourself be happy. Let there be

smiles and well-wishing and glad-to-see-you greetings. Let there be one day to set aside the gloom and doom of the world.

We are aided in our celebration by the coming of spring. The green is returning to the grass and the trees and everywhere flowers bloom and flowering trees bless the landscape. Chilly temperatures and strong winds give way to warm sunshine and each day the light lasts a little longer than the day before. Go for a walk if you can or just sit out on the porch for a few minutes, let the weight of the world fall off your shoulders for awhile and savor just being alive.

Beyond the Celebration

But soon enough Monday comes and we are confronted with the implications of our faith. What does it mean to live resurrection faith? There are exhortations to be made, though they are not original, not ones that haven't been made for centuries since the first Easter. Nonetheless, they are worth mentioning.

Goodness

Because of the Resurrection of Jesus, be good. Do as much good as you are able, never becoming discouraged by your limitations or disheartened by failures. Become like our Methodist neighbors in the Wesleyan charge:

“Do all the good you can

By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as you ever can.”

We do this good *because* Christ lives, not to try and earn what has already been given. Think of the 23rd Psalm, “God leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake.” We have been so led.

Gratitude

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, let us be thankful in all things; for the precious gift of life in all its glory and wonder, for friends and family, for meaningful work, and for the church, and for the promise of eternal life.

Love and Forgiveness

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, love, our neighbors as ourselves. Restrain judgment and where failures of love are met, forgive; both friends and adversaries. Rise up from your own failures and grant the space for others to rise up from theirs.

Peace

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, rest. Think again of the 23rd Psalm, “God makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me besides still waters and

restores my soul.” The word we often use to describe this rest which is the result of the resurrection is, “peace,” and by it is meant an inner peace that prevails even in the most chaotic of circumstances, when surrounded by circumstances that are not at all peaceful.

Joy

And because of the resurrection of Jesus, allow yourself to be joyful. While there is much sadness in the world and much to grieve, nonetheless be joyful. “Rejoice in the Lord,” Paul wrote to the Philippians, and he repeated himself for good measure. Have joy.

Goodness and gratitude; love and forgiveness; peace and joy; these are the products of a life lived out of the miraculous faith in the Resurrection of Jesus. Seek them, nurture them, hold fast to them.

Hope

And to these we add, *hope*. Hope for the future both in this life and in the next. Hope for one’s personal situation and hope for the world; an undying hope that is not defeated by the world’s darkness because it is established in Christ’s light, and shown forth in his raising.

Happy Easter!

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