

Matthew 28:1-10
April 9, 2023

Every Good Thing

A few weeks ago the scripture lesson took us to the story in the Gospel of John in which Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the grave. In that story, Jesus engages in conversation, Martha, one of the sisters of Lazarus. He said these words to her:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life. The person who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” And then he asked her, “Do you believe this?”

It was not *that* much later that Jesus himself had died. The death of Jesus was no ordinary death. It was the death of God’s Holy One, and thus it stood for the victory of death over life once and for all, the annihilation of the goodness of life and of the power of life to create and redeem, cradle and bless, to shine light into darkness.

In the death of Jesus, we are all vulnerable because we too must die. This is not a very uplifting truth about the experience of being a human being. But it is indisputable. We are also vulnerable because we all participate in sin, thus we share the world’s guilt. This is not a very *noble* truth about the experience of being a human being. But it is also indisputable.

It is not helpful for us as believers to skip over the not very uplifting and not very noble truths about

ourselves and about our lives. When we do, we miss the depth of meaning that is imbedded in in Easter.

It is, however, hard to speak of its meaning. It is beyond the power of words to convey. In one of the best Hollywood accounts of the gospel story, Ben Hur, the 1960 version, there is a choir singing Handel at this point. Perhaps our musical expressions are better at the meaning of Easter. Words do well at stating the fact of it. When the third day came, there was little more to do than proclaim.

On that Sunday morning, Mary and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was an earthquake. An angel rolled away the stone that served as a cover for the entrance of the cave that was the tomb. The appearance of the angel was like lightning and the guards froze in place like *they themselves* had died.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel said to the women, because whenever a human being is confronted with the divine, fear, and I don’t mean “respect,” but fear, terror, is the first response. “Do not be afraid. He is not here, he has risen, come and see, go and tell.”

There is no attempt to expound its meaning. The earth shook but there was no choir singing hallelujah. Perhaps at first all that is needed is the fact of it . . . maybe that is all we can take in. But sooner or later we will speak of its meaning. What can we say?

We can say that Jesus was not risen in the same way as was Lazarus, who came back to his ordinary

existence to die other time. This was no ordinary resurrection. It was immortality that Jesus had put on. The resurrected body is not like the resuscitated body.

We can also say that the situation has been reversed. There is a, “New Creation,” is one of the ways Paul said it. It stands for the final victory of *life* over death, once and for all; the annihilation of the annihilation, so to speak, the affirmation of the goodness of life and its power to create and to redeem, cradle and bless, and shine its light into our lives.

At Easter, we can say that the proclamation sets us to waiting - a glorious waiting; an eternal, faithful, hopeful, waiting, as the day of our own resurrection draws near. The not very uplifting and not very noble truths about human life are changed, so that we are no longer threatened by them; they are transformed in the waiting for the eternal victory.

We still die, but yet we live, it is as if we never die. We still sin, but it does not threaten us, because the power of sin has been broken, which led Paul to these words when he rhapsodized about it in First Corinthians:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory!
Where, O Death, is your victory?
Where, O Death, *is your sting?*

. . .
But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

So let there be joy. For this day at least, because though we celebrate Easter one day out of the year, Easter is true every day. Perhaps we are not up to joy everyday. But for this one day think of every good thing that happens:

The breath in your lungs upon awakening in the morning

The sunshine and the rain, the flowers and the trees of springtime

The time spent with the blessed gift of friends and family

The bounty of life shared; laughter; and the delightful pleasures of life, not pursued or grasped, as if we can own them, but received and lived with heartfelt gratitude

The times when miracle breaks into the ordinariness of the days

Take it all in, and consider it, because it serves as a sign like Lazarus coming forth out of the grave; like Jesus himself, the Resurrection and the Life, heading towards Galilee and then heaven, pointing to the eternal life which we have been promised, and in which by grace, we all take part.

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