

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 The Simplicity of Easter
John 20:1-18
March 31, 2024

Easter is a simple celebration. And it is beautiful in its simplicity. One does not have to understand Newtonian Calculus or Einsteinian Physics or Binary Code, or even the intricacies of Augustinian theology to be swept up in its magnificence.

What was dead . . . is alive again. More particularly, the one who was crucified has been raised to new life. That is what we celebrate. That is the simple truth and reality in which we live, and which accompanies us throughout all our days.

Like our physical lives, which always move towards our physical deaths, the Lenten story has taken us into a grave, the tomb itself. One of the strengths of the Christian faith is its insistence upon taking sin and death *very* seriously.

There is a breathing space for people to deal with the realities of earthly life with a persistent hope emerging from the grace, that what was dead, is made alive again. We believe in the Resurrection of the Dead. That is the source of our hope and our joy.

Part of the simplicity of it is in the way the story is told in scripture. We all know the story, but we tell it again anyway, this time from the Gospel of John, which differs in a few of the details when compared to the other gospels.

It was early in the morning on the first day of the week. Mary Magdalene (In John, she is by herself), went to the tomb at first light on the day after the Sabbath. She knew that there would be a stone covering the entrance to the tomb to seal it up, and presumably was wondering how she was going to get it open.

Upon her arrival she discovered that the stone had already been removed. And then we run into some of the unique features of the way John tells the story. She didn't go in. Instead she ran to find Peter. There is no mention of an angel to make an announcement at this point. That happens later.

After telling the disciples that the Lord's body had been taken, Peter and the other disciple have a race to the tomb. We are told that the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but he only looked and did not actually enter. Then Peter arrived all out of breath, and *went* in and saw the burial clothing; and then at last, the other disciple, presumably John, also entered . . . and *believed*.

There is a kind of interesting joy in the various tellings of the story. It is a little different in each one of the gospels; Mary is either alone or with other women. It happened while it was still dark, or just after the sunrise. And there is the interesting question about the identity of the first believer.

One could imagine them in a panel discussion on a talk show or even a podcast all these years later

quibbling amongst themselves about the details but not really caring all that much which version of the story carries the day. All that matters is that he was dead . . . and is alive again.

Later, after Peter and the other disciple had returned home, Mary lingered. At this point in the story, no one had actually seen Jesus. After having hesitated, she mustered the courage to look, and peeped in, and that is the part in which the angels appear.

The story continues as Mary remains in that place. At one point she turns around and sees Jesus standing there, but comically, she did not recognize him in his resurrection body. She mistook him for the gardener. As she tries to explain her predicament, he simply says her name. It does not take that much imagination to picture the scene when she realized that it was Jesus, and that he was indeed alive.

He told her not to hold on to him, but rather to go tell his brothers, and he gave her this message; tell them, “I am returning to my father and your father, to my God and your God.” That was it.

At this point one might think some kind of theological reflection or inspiring devotional or even an evangelistic appeal would be in order. And all these things are in order. But the wonder of Easter is that it is simple enough just to let the story stand on its own, at least for awhile.

It is like the voice of God in the Book of Job, which is silent until the end and when it comes, the power of it is less in the words that are spoken, “who is this that darkness counsel by words without knowledge?” Than simply in the sound of the voice, as if to say, “you *are* here after all.” “You *are* alive, can it be true?”

But sooner or later, words will come, and it is best to use the same words, or similar, to the one’s we have used about the cross. The living Jesus is the other side of the coin from the crucified Jesus.

If the cross of Jesus is the majesty of God on full display on earth, then the resurrection is the majesty of God on display throughout the universe, for it speaks of the triumph of courage over fear, mercy over judgment, meaning over despair. Even the language of the victory of life over death, good over evil, light over darkness is not going too far. The resurrection of Jesus stands for the victory in our own lives of generosity and kindness and love over selfishness and anger and fear.

Faith in resurrection means belief in the mandate to kindness and helpfulness, forgiveness and reconciliation; it means belief in friendship, that God intends that people should be mindful of the well-being of others and not strictly concerned about themselves; that service and sacrifice, even pain and suffering, can be redemptive.

And *that* faith and *that* victory is played out in big and small ways everyday and everywhere people are found

in the world. It often stands in direct opposition to the news of the day, to what Reinhold Niebuhr called the, “obvious facts of history,” but it stands victorious nonetheless. And today is the day we celebrate it, this victory of redeeming love over death and sin and everything else that contradicts life. Easter is beautiful in its simplicity. Let this be the glorious day that it is.

God bless you all and Happy Easter!

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