

Easter Sunday

April 21st, 2019

Luke 24:1-12

By Thomas L. Truby

Resurrected!

On Good Friday we focused on how Jesus was innocent of the crimes for which he was put to death. On Easter morning we discover this Innocent One has been resurrected! “On the first day of the week, at early dawn,” some women “came to the tomb.” They found the stone rolled away but they did not find the body. They were perplexed and worried. What had happened here? We still struggle to fathom the meaning of the Resurrection. This morning I want to share with you some of my thoughts.

I believe in a literal resurrection. God did raise the man, Jesus, from the dead. This happened in history and caused the church to come into existence. It was not a psychological or symbolic change in the disciples that happened to them because of Jesus’ teaching or because of his death. No, it was after his resurrection; as they rethought his life, his teachings and his death in view of it, that what he had said and done began to make sense to them. Slowly, as the meaning of the resurrection clarified, they began seeing in a new way, a way radically different than they had ever seen before.

I believe the Resurrection of Christ is a unique event in history. The crucifixion in one form or another is not unique but the resurrection is. The Easter story we heard again this morning took place not only literally at dawn, but also at the dawn of a new era. Jesus rising from the grave wasn’t just resuscitation from the dead; it was God, the Creator, doing something completely new and, by doing it, finishing creation. To do this, God sent his Son who would perfectly imitate his heavenly Father and imitate him all the way even to dying on the cross.

All other humans from Adam and Eve on had fallen away from imitating God and had instead imitated each other. This caused all kinds of problems since they all wanted the same things, imitating each other as they did, and so they rivaled and fought each other to obtain them. Genesis tells the story of how Cain envied Abel, went to the field with him and murdered him. The voice of Abel, the innocent victim of Cain’s envy, is heard when his blood cries out from the earth. The voice of the victim in the Bible gets louder until it crescendos in the crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospels do not hide the victim’s innocence. The Gospels also know that if this Son followed only God’s voice, humans would resent him, scapegoat him and banish him from the earth. God knew that putting Jesus in our midst would lead to a Cross. But how else could God

expose what we do so that we could open ourselves to his forgiveness and begin letting go of our desire to assert ourselves over our neighbor?

Even so, humans have been slow to “get it”, for we’ve banished millions of scapegoats fully believing they were guilty and that we were doing God’s will in dispatching them. No, the Cross alone would not break through the barrier of our denial; something more would have to be done. God would have to raise Jesus from the dead to show us that life is the power of God and the universe, not fear and death.

I believe the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a vindication of Jesus’ work; his life, teaching and death. It’s God’s exclamation point that tells us, “Jesus got it right”. Jesus does speak for God and tells the world what God is like. Jesus does reveal God’s heart. Not the words of the Bible but Jesus himself. Because of the Resurrection, something new is known. Something has occurred that is so extraordinary the disciples could not ignore it. Without the Resurrection Jesus would have remained a small and insignificant footnote in Jewish history—another prophet killed in the line of duty. Without the Resurrection God would still love humanity but we probably wouldn’t know it.

The Resurrection reveals a power superior to violent contagion—that mob power which moves through us so invisibly. The events of Holy Week trace the power of the mob, the accusing finger, the driving movement of people in need of a victim. When near the mob, even the disciples could not resist this force and scattered fearfully into the night thinking that Jesus must have been a deluded prophet who had deceived them. They lost perspective on Jesus. Peter himself denied that he knew Jesus—and this after Jesus had warned that he would. The power of being like everybody else is incredible and when it is directed toward violence and evil rather than love and good, it becomes frightening and destructive. This power has always been unstoppable—that is, until the Resurrection. The resurrection shows us that death has no real power when we know that God creates and recreates. Because of the resurrection we know life and love are ultimate not death.

The resurrection was the power that broke the early disciples out of their trance. It showed them that the whole world around them could be wrong and that this one man, Jesus, could be right, even though every one else saw him as wrong! This is why the Resurrection was needed as a vindication of Jesus. Only it was powerful enough to triumph over “group think,” the strength of everyone imitating everyone else, the powerful sheep-like pattern so characteristic of human behavior. The resurrection broke the pattern and brought back the possibility of imitating God rather than each other.

The Resurrection reveals Jesus as the victim who forgives: making forgiveness, not vengeance, the driving force in history. Before the Resurrection, the victim's voice was almost always lost when the story of history was told. History was the story of the winners and the losers had no voice though Cain's blood did cry out. In Jesus the victim's voice finds expression and preaches forgiveness and peace.

When humans put Jesus to death we knew, at some level, that we were wrong— again doing this evil thing we always do but deny. But what does Jesus do? From the cross, he asks the father to forgive us and publically acknowledges that we don't know what we are doing. What could be more forgiving than that? Let them off the hook Lord, they don't know what they are doing.

The Resurrection reveals that Jesus was speaking for God in forgiving us. Jesus had allowed himself to become a victim so that he could speak forgiveness to us in a way that we could hear it. With the Resurrection, "forgiveness is raised from the tomb," as St. John Chrysostom so eloquently declares. In the Cross we learn about ourselves but in the resurrection we learn about God. Can you think of better news than that?

The Resurrection reveals the secret about God: And what is that secret? The secret is that God is love. Not just that God desires love, but that God is love. The God who could have been distant and sovereign chose rather to be love, to be in relationship, to be in love with us—no coercion, no wrath; only love and sometimes sadness and suffering as God sees what we do—the children on the border without their parents, those children in Yemen who are systematically being starved to death, and the people of Venezuela who find themselves in the cross fire of history. He grieves for them and many more. But love never forces itself on others! God will not force us to imitate his will. The choice is always ours.

Finally, the Resurrection of Jesus announces a new day, a new creation; a new world. The old world has sunk though the news of it is just now dawning on us. In this new world, we are understood, loved and forgiven and our Risen Lord is here with us. He has been resurrected! This is the Good News on Easter Sunday, 2019. Amen.