

A WAKE-UP CALL

John 20 & 21

Easter, April 5, 2015

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EASTER LESSON: (excerpts from) John 20 & 21

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. When she saw the stone had been rolled away from the entrance, she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple – the one Jesus loved – and told them, “The Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! We don’t know where they have put him.”

At that, Simon Peter and the other disciple ran side by side to the tomb and when they arrived they saw the linens that had covered Jesus lying on the ground. As yet they didn’t understand the scripture that Jesus was to rise from the dead so they went back to their homes.

Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. As she wept, she saw two angels in dazzling robes and they asked her, “Why are you weeping?”

She answered them, “Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don’t know where they have put his body.”

No sooner had she said this than she turned around and caught sight of Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was him. He asked her, “Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?”

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, “Please, if you’re the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you’ve laid the body and I will take it away.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned to him and said, “Rabboni!” – which means “Teacher.”

Jesus said, “Don’t hold on to me for I have not yet ascended. Rather, go tell the sisters and brothers that I am ascending to my God and to your God.”

So Mary went to the disciples and announced, “I have seen the Teacher!”

...

Peter had returned to his fishing boat and, having fished all night, he caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus met Peter and the others on the shore. He had prepared fish and bread for them and he said, “Come and eat your meal.” When they had eaten, Jesus said, “Peter, do you love me?”

“Yes,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Anthem: *We Hear Your Voice, O Christ* by Rick Asher & Jim Segaar

A voice whispered, "Mary," as she wept at the tomb despondent in her grief.
“Rabboni!” she exclaimed as her despair turned to joy and she ran to spread the news.

A voice questioned, "Peter?" while he walked by the lake, guilt-ridden and ashamed.

“Yes!, Yes! I love you,” he cried out, as fear and doubt converted to strength by which he boldly would preach.

A voice calls out our names; shall we turn away in fear?
Dare we rise up in faith? Rise up and let our voices be heard?
We hear your voice, O Christ!

Refrain: Alleluia! Christ is Risen! And we are rising too!

1. We hear your voice, O Christ! “Arise!” we hear you say.
Transforming fear to strength, we follow in your way.

2. We do your work, O Christ; we comfort poor and weak; We stand with all the oppressed and bid the voiceless speak.

3. We share your love, O Christ, seek you in all we meet, Treat enemies as friends, your peace to make complete.

4. We rise to greet you, Christ, the stone is rolled away!
Exalting we rejoice in this our Easter Day!

SERMON: *A Wake-Up Call*

Thank you Rick and Jim for the gift of this music. If I may, I would like to suggest that it is our “Easter Wake-Up Call.”

Maybe it was an alarm that woke you up this morning – some machine that squawked at you until it annoyed you enough to get you out of bed ... or irritating you enough to throw it across the room. You may have a kinder, gentler version but even that is different than a wake-up *call*.

A wake-up call is a *voice* that calls you and says something like, “This is your 6 a.m. wake-up call, Mr. Phillips.” It’s a voice and, even though they are all pretty much computer-generated now, I can’t top myself from saying, “thank you.”

And so, on this Easter morning ...
We hear your voice, O Christ!
“Arise!” we hear you say.
Transforming fear to strength,
We follow in your way.

It’s our Easter wake-up call.

And we probably need one because all the gospels agree that Easter happens early. I like the version of the Luke story Katie read for us at the beginning of the service – this all happened “at the crack of dawn.” And all the other gospels chime in, “as the first day of the week was dawning,” Matthew 28.1. “Very early on the first day of the week,” Mark 16.2. “Early in the morning while it was still dark,” John says.

Maybe we need a wake-up call because there is a pull – sometimes an irresistible pull – to go back to sleep; literally and metaphorically. Sometimes there is a resistance to opening our eyes and facing the day.

There can be this struggle between the consciousness of our dreams and the interactions of the day. Do you ever wake up from a particularly vivid dream and ask yourself: Did that really happen or was it just a dream?

Of course dreams are real too in their own way. And dreams – of the night and of the day – can impact what happens when we wake up. Still, a wake-up call can help us with that transition of consciousness that takes place when we move from sleep to the world of another kind of interactions.

We may be groggy, maybe a little disoriented, at first. We may wake up with some vague memory of the world we left behind and some foggy imagination of about the one that lies ahead.

And, unless we are characters in the *Ground Hog Day* movie, we can’t live yesterday over again. Like the song says, “Yesterday’s gone.” There are traces of yesterday in today – traces of millions of yesterdays – but this wake-up call is the call to be present to a new day.

Since way before Jesus we have been trying to ignore the wake-up call of the prophet Isaiah: “I am doing a *new* thing,” God says, “*now* is springs forth! Can’t you see it? I am making a road in the desert and rivers to flow in the wilderness.”

In a way, every morning is a little exercise in resurrection. And we may need a wake-up call.

We lost a great teacher this year. Marcus Borg, who stood in this pulpit on more than one occasion, died in January. Marcus caught a lot of grief because he was honest about how the faith of his childhood had died; about how the scholarship of his student years and his fascination with the Christian tradition lead him from being a “closet agnostic” to a “closet atheist;” and about how, in his 30s, he experienced radical wonder that lead him to new understandings.

He had no interest in breathing life back into something that was dead. His work wasn’t about turning off your mind or going back to sleep. It was about waking up – about ‘meeting Jesus again for the first time.’

Gordon and Roxana Harper went to his memorial at Trinity Cathedral in Portland and they brought back a bulletin from that service. While people accused him of *not really* believing in resurrection, this is how his service began – with an 8th century poem attributed to St. Patrick ...

I arise today

Through the strength of Heaven

Light of sun

Radiance of moon ...

I arise today

Through Gods strength to pilot me

Gods eye to look before me

Gods wisdom to guide me ...

From all who shall wish me ill

Afar and anear

Alone and in a multitude

Against every cruel merciless power

That may oppose my body and soul

Christ with me, Christ before me ...

Christ when I lie down ... Christ when I arise ...

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me

I arise today.

Resurrection wasn't about reviving something. It was about transforming it.

All the gospels seem pretty clear about that. The Jesus the disciples meet in the Easter stories is one they don't immediately recognize. He's changed. He's different. They are meeting Jesus again for the first time.

Still at the tomb weeping, Mary sees him as a gardener. And, as I've said on other Easters, perhaps that's the truest case of mistaken identity ever. Pastor Ned last week referred to the little kid who said, "we aren't burying Jesus; we're planting him."

And that's exactly right. The 'hidden Jesus' of John 12 tries to warn the disciples, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain;" he says, "but if it dies it bears much fruit." And the disciples don't want to hear it because they want to hold on to *their* version of him.

And now that Jesus *is* dead. And, in John 20, he is both seed *and* the gardener. So, when Mary recognizes Jesus in the sound of her own name, that voice says, "Don't hold on to me." Yesterday's gone.

I can't imagine how hard that would be to hear. This Jesus she loved didn't just belong to her alone in the garden anymore. He is risen – and still rising, apparently – which seems to mean he could appear anywhere and to *anyone*.

It's Mary's wake-up call ...
We share your love, O Christ!
Seek you in all we meet.

That's waking up to a whole different kind of relationship.

And then there's Peter. After all that happened – the amazing things and the disappointing things; the bravado and the betrayal; the death and the emptiness – maybe Peter thought he could go back to sleep. He could just go home. He could go back to his boat, back to fishing, back to his old way of life. Maybe it wasn't anything sinister or selfish. It was just familiar.

And Jesus shows up.

Or is it? *Someone* is cooking breakfast on the beach and John says, they know it *could* be Jesus but they aren't quite sure and no one dares to ask.

Eating together is something familiar to all of them, something they did with each other every day. They fed thousands with just a little bread and a few fish. They had just had dinner together a few days ago in that upper room where Jesus took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to all of them. But there was something unfamiliar about this meal sitting together on the beach. Same ingredients. New day.

This time the voice says, “Peter, do you love me?” Perhaps not an odd question for Jesus to ask, but is this Jesus?

“Sure,” Peter says. “Of course I love you.”

Three times the voice asks and three times Peter says yes. And with each yes, the voice says, “feed my sheep.” I’ve got your number, the voice says, and this is your wake up call. And by the way, it’s a new day. You’re not a fisherman anymore, you’re a shepherd. “Feed my sheep.”

It’s that wake-up call:

To share your love, O Christ!

Seek you in all we meet ...

To do your work,

To comfort poor and weak;

To stand with the oppressed

And bid the voiceless speak.

Can we just say that, whatever else it means, this wake-up call isn’t about putting any effort into legislation that would allow us, in the name of Jesus, to *not* serve people?

I know the merits of religious freedom – I’m a Baptist after all. And I know from my lawyer friends that the legislation in Indiana and Arkansas is complicated.

But I agree with the pastor from Indiana who writes that the real problem with what’s going on is that Christians have ...

... in no shortage of ways broken relationships with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer community. We have expelled our sons and daughters. We have protested them. We blame them for the ills of society ...

in the eyes of society [he writes] the morality of same-sex marriage has already been decided. It's over. The morality that matters [now is how we treat people] ... When we fear having a law force us to serve someone, I think it is safe to say we don't love them.

This is, I think, a wake-up call for us. It's not enough for us anymore to just say: Well, we aren't *those* kind of Christians. We aren't *that* kind of church. It's too late for that. The idea that people will just listen to us and believe what we say is dead.

The only thing left for us in this new day is to wake up and do our work.

“Do you love me?” hundreds of voices ask.

And, if our answer is YES, YES, YES, a thousand times YES! Then, the voice says, “feed my sheep.”

That's part of the reason why everyone is invited to this table – not only because you are already loved but because we are promising to do our best to love you too.

Maybe, like this bread, our hearts will get broken in the process.

If you keep your heart open, Anne Lamott says, [there are traumas that will beat you down. But against all odds, something emerges from the wreckage of our hearts so we can bear witness ... Love falls to earth, rises from the ground, pools around the afflicted. Love pulls people back to their feet. Bodies and souls are fed. Bones and lives heal. New blades of grass grow ... The sun rises.

And this is our wake-up call ...

We hear your voice, O Christ!

“Arise!” we hear you say.

And today, if you hear that voice, do not harden your hearts.

NOTES

The Easter Anthem is a world premier of a piece with music by Rick Asher, former Choral Director of Seattle First Baptist Church, and words by Jim Segaar, a current member of the choir and the church's Director of Media Ministries. The anthem seeks to combine the glory of traditional Easter music with a contemporary call to action, using the stories of two people whose lives were changed forever on that first Easter morning. Marcus Borg outlines his journey in *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), see especially pp.13-14. The 8th century poem attributed to St. Patrick was translated from Old Irish by Kuno Meyer and is titled, “The Deer's Cry.” The article by the pastor can be found at www.natepyle.com. The quote by Anne Lamott is in *Help Thanks Wow* (Riverhead Books, 2012), pp.79-82.