

The Resurrection of our Lord

April 23, 2003

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Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-2

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 John 20:1-18

Reawakening the Heart

Today's Gospel narrative of Mary weeping outside the tomb and Jesus meeting her there has always been one of my favorite stories in the New Testament. When I was a little girl, I loved the part of the story where Jesus "fools" Mary into thinking that he was the gardener. At least that's what I **thought** Jesus was doing when I heard the story as a child – playing a big trick on Mary. It reminded me of other stories I knew that had cases of mistaken identity in them – like the wolf who pretends to be Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, or the evil witch who pretends to be a beautiful princess. Unlike these stories, though, Jesus' "trick" didn't seem to me to be a mean or a scary one. It seemed like a really good "trick" instead. Kind of like when the frog turns into a handsome prince. Jesus played that "trick" on Mary, I thought, so that when he said her name and she finally knew it was Jesus instead of the gardener, she could be **so** happy and wouldn't be sad at all any more. I thought that was why Jesus played a trick on her – so that she could be **so** happy at the end of the story. And, in fact, this is finally a narrative about pure delight, isn't it? What incredible joy and delight Mary must have felt in seeing Jesus, who had died a painful death right in front of her, alive and in the flesh again. I can't imagine a happier moment for anybody than to meet a loved one, who has died, alive and in the flesh again. To talk together, to say and hear each other's names again, to look into each other's eyes again -- what an amazing experience that would be – pure joy – no doubt.

So, it wasn't until I got older that I realized that this narrative is undeniably also a story about broken hearts. I read more carefully and realized that Jesus wasn't playing a trick on Mary at all. We find her weeping outside the tomb quite simply because her heart is broken. She thinks Jesus is the gardener because she is overcome by her own deep grief. And what is more, she can't even find the hope of comfort at the graveside, because now Jesus' dead body is missing. How had I missed all this as a child? I don't know, really. And, in case you think I'm criticizing my childhood understanding of this text as "wrong" or "simplistic," let me say that I am not. After all, in a very real way I had grasped the point of the story – pure delight in discovering that Jesus, who had really

died, was alive again. Later on, though, as I looked into the story, it seemed that all I couldn't escape seeing the broken hearts there.

We see them too, right? Mary's heart is broken most certainly. And, no doubt Simon Peter's heart is in a thousand pieces as well. Not only does he have to face his heart-numbing grief at the death of his beloved friend and teacher; he is also having to live with an ocean of regret at having denied even knowing Jesus in the end. And now, on top of it all, Mary reports that Jesus' body is missing. It can't get any worse for Peter than this last piece of news. No wonder he runs to the tomb. How much more brokenness can one man take? And then, of course, there is the disciple whom Jesus loved. Another broken heart. These two disciples run to the tomb – not because they have understood Jesus as resurrected, never to die again. The text takes great pains to make that clear. Even after they see that Mary is right and that Jesus' dead body is indeed missing, the text tells us that “as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” (vs.9) And who can blame them for this lack of understanding? They didn't understand that Jesus must rise from the dead. Can we really say that **we** understand the necessity of his resurrection any better than they did?

More about that perplexing question in a minute. First, I think it is important to identify at least one more broken heart in the story – maybe two. Let's see – we see Mary's broken heart, Peter's, and the beloved disciples'. Who's heart is left? I want to suggest to you that God's own heart is an important presence in this story! And, although in this particular text we do not see God's broken heart, in the narrative John's Gospel recounts of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial God's broken heart is there for all to see. Jesus of Nazareth, the beloved Son of God, the One in whom God is well pleased, has been executed at the hands of human beings. It isn't too much of a stretch, I think, to imagine God weeping outside the tomb of Jesus. Jesus' lot on the cross – rejection, abandonment, pain, and death – is God's own lot in a true sense. In Jesus of Nazareth, God, the creator of all life, has embraced the world, loved it, and suffered its tragedies with it to the end. In the face of this, God's own heart, like the curtain in the temple, is torn in two.

And so it is that in the text before us this morning we see God's heart again, but wonderfully and amazingly it is no longer broken. God's heart of love and compassion -- God's own heart for the world and all its creatures -- has been resurrected and reawakened in God's own act of resurrecting his beloved, Jesus of Nazareth. God's resurrection of Jesus shows us God's reawakened heart – a heart that beats with an irrevocable love for us and for our world – a love that

not even death can destroy. The resurrection of Jesus is what God does, first and foremost to heal and reawaken the divine broken heart.

I think this realization – that in Jesus’ resurrection God reawakens his own broken heart – helps me to understand a little bit better why Jesus **must** rise from the dead. Remember, we asked ourselves the question earlier as to whether we really could say that we understood the necessity of Jesus’ resurrection? You see, the resurrection of Jesus is not a kind of “personal reward” for Jesus from God. It is much more than that. It is the definitive revelation of God’s victory over a broken heart. It is the tangible sign and promise of God that the divine heart does not remain broken, but is rather living and beating once and for all for the life of the world. And this news – that God’s heart does not remain broken, even when we are the ones to break it – is the only news capable of reawakening Mary’s broken heart, or Peter’s, or ours. Anything less would have left the state of God’s heart a mystery to them and to us. Jesus **must** rise from the dead because God’s irrevocable love of the world **must** be spoken, even in, through, and beyond the finality of death.

This is the good news of Easter – Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! God’s heart is no longer broken. No longer broken, indeed! Alleluia! In fact, “God’s heart beats with such love for us”¹, as Luther said, that we can trust that God not only promises to, but is capable of reawakening Mary’s broken heart, the disciples’ broken hearts, and our broken hearts as well.

I guess that’s the last broken heart I want to talk about this morning -- your broken heart and mine. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we are invited to trust in God’s promise to heal our own broken hearts – to reawaken them to love and life for the sake of the world. The resurrection of Jesus shows us that God not only promises to do this, but is capable of doing so, and endlessly willing to do so. The Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, puts it this way:

In the Lord’s resurrection, God has shown that he has taken the earth to his heart forever. ... The reality beyond all the distress of sin and death is not up yonder; it has come down and dwells in the innermost reality of our flesh.²

But, Rahner continues,

One thing is needed, it is true, for God’s action, which we can never undo, to become the benediction of our human reality. He must break open the tomb of our hearts. He must rise from the center of our being also, where he **is** present as power and as promise. There, God is still in movement. There it is still Holy Saturday until the last day, which will be the universal Easter of the cosmos.³

¹ Martin Luther, “A Meditation on Christ’s Passion” *LW* 42, 13.

² Karl Rahner, “A Faith that Loves The Earth,” *Everyday Faith*, 82-83.

³ *Ibid.*, 83.

Because God has reawakened the divine heart forever in resurrecting Jesus, then, we are invited to trust, perhaps timidly at first, in both the promise and the power of God to reawaken the tombs of our own hearts and the tombs of this lost and warring world. Who else but God -- who now forever lives in the innermost reality of this world -- who else but God could mend all that is broken here? May this God break us open, reawakening our hearts so that the way we live will proclaim that Christ is risen, risen indeed! Amen.