

“When our eyes are opened”
What the Easter moment means for people of faith

April 26, 2009

Text: Job 42:1-6, Luke 24:13-35

I.

As many of you know, for the most part, I’m a **Lectioary** preacher. The Lectionary is a three year plan of suggested scripture readings for each week throughout the calendar year. The idea is that if you stick to the Lectionary, you’ll cover most of the Bible over this three-year period.

Anyway, I was pleased to note that the **bold printed** reading for this Sunday—two weeks after Easter—was in fact portions of the resurrection account in Luke’s gospel.

Interestingly, I was feeling a need to reflect more on the larger meaning of resurrection. To try and capture it all in one sermon on Easter morning is never enough.

For the disciples (and if we think about it, it makes sense), the resurrection happened in stages. And how could it not? Isn’t that the way faith happens? There are key moments, to be sure—but faith and our spiritual life is a process, isn’t it?

The seeds are planted and nurtured along the way, which is why it’s important to bring our children to church, so they can learn our Christian story and begin the process of faith development.

It wasn’t like the disciples and Jesus’ other followers—particularly some of the women—simply awoke on Easter morning and—boom—in an instant, it all happened for them.

You may recall the story of Russian comedian, Yakov Smirnoff who, when he first came to the United States wasn’t prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in our supermarkets.

*He says, On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk—you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice—you just add water, and you get orange juice. Then when I saw baby powder, I thought to myself, **wow, what a country.***

When Peter and John and the others went to the tomb and saw that it was empty, their first reaction wasn’t, *Wow, what a God!* That would come later. Their first reaction was no doubt bewilderment tinged with fear.

Whoa! They might have exclaimed, *What’s going on here?*

II.

For those first believers, the Easter experience happened over time. There were poignant moments to be sure, but it wasn't like the disciples had been given a prep course on resurrection: *what to look for, where to look for it and on and on*.

Jesus had talked to them about his resurrection but, for the most part, at the time, they didn't *get it*. It was too much, too overwhelming ...

Still, in some way, there must have been an impulse within them that was looking for *something more*. Isn't that what we human beings do? Don't we live our lives *waiting* for something more to come. With all we deal with in life ... our many challenges and ups and downs and on and on, who among us ever wants to conclude: *you mean that's all there is?* Aren't we, all the time, hoping *there's more?*

From the point of view of Jesus' disciples and early followers, could the crucifixion possibly be *all there is?*

Methodist Bishop, **William Willimon** said once:

Show me a person who is not waiting for something—not yearning, leaning forward, standing on tip toe for something better, and I'll show you a person who's given up ...someone who has settled too easily for the present arrangements.

And that's always sad, he says. Because the future belongs for those who wait with hope in their hearts—to those who KNOW we are meant for something better.

Whatever our present darkness, anxiety or fear, that is not our final destination. And so, as the dark abyss of crucifixion settled in, what were the disciples and Jesus' other followers to do? Early on, they were totally lost.

But then, gradually, Easter began to happen. The story of the **Emmaus Road** experience is an excellently crafted example of this. Clearly, faith building happened on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus ... but, again, in stages.

Let's take a look!

III.

First, two of Jesus' disconsolate followers were on their way to Emmaus, the small village where they lived, a few miles outside Jerusalem. As they walked along, they were discussing all that had happened ...

Then, the text says: *Jesus himself came near and went with them ... but they didn't recognize him.* (Interestingly, he's there, but they don't recognize him. What does that

mean? Is he there in his *spiritual body*, which the Apostle Paul talks about in some of his letters?

Going on, Jesus asks them what they were discussing? Finally, one of them answers him:

1. *Why, the things about Jesus of Nazareth ... how he was a prophet and good things were happening ...*
2. *But then our leaders handed him over to be crucified. It was awful ...*
3. *And we had such hopes in him ...that he would be the ONE ...*
4. *But now it's the 3rd day since all this happened ...*
5. *and some of our women went to the tomb ... but they didn't find his body there ...*
6. *And apparently they saw a vision of angels that said he was alive ...*
7. *some of our group went to the tomb ... but they didn't see him ...*

At this point, these Emmaus Road followers still didn't believe.

But then Jesus began to talk to them and he explained the scriptures to them. It's like they had a Bible lesson there on the Emmaus Road.

And soon they're arriving at their village ... and clearly, they've been energized by Jesus' explanation of things. At this point they appear to be *on the edge of belief*.

So they convince Jesus (whom they still don't totally recognize) to stay with them at their home ... and they go in ... and they're at the table with Jesus ... and he takes bread, blesses it and gives it to them ... and then it happens: **the Easter moment**:

Their eyes were opened, the text says, and they recognize him ... and then, instantly, he vanishes from their sight.

For them, resurrection came ... in stages. And now they believe and they reflect back about their experience:

And weren't our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, opening the scriptures to us.

IV.

And of course, with this powerful moment, everything changes. This is the definitive element in the resurrection—in the Easter experience: the lives of those who believed in him and who wanted so desperately for everything NOT to be over ... their lives were changed.

That's what we're left with. Not with any logical proof ... or scientific explanation. Bottom line: their lives were different. And that's what's important. What's important, as Christians, as believers, is that when faith comes—*when our eyes are opened*—that our lives are changed.

As the Easter experience plays out in their lives, they see the world differently—through the eyes of resurrection, of Jesus being alive; through the eyes of the powerful truth they had witnessed with Jesus in Galilee and later in Jerusalem: the truth about love and compassion and on and on.

Emphatically, this will be the truth of their lives; and as Christians, this is our truth as well. To see the world through the eyes of love, compassion, and hope ... which also means, peace with justice.

And as their Easter experience continued to mature and grow, they grew to believe that it was this life (Jesus' life) that God claimed as God's own life; and thus, God's eternal purposes were revealed in and through Jesus.

When our eyes are opened, friends, to the power of God in the world, to the power of love and compassion, to the power of forgiveness and renewal, and to the power of peace with justice initiatives, Easter happens.

V.

It was said that the great Michaelangelo attracted a crowd of spectators as he worked. One child in particular, one day, was fascinated by the sight of chips flying and the sound of the mallet on chisel as the master shaped a large block of white marble.

Unable to contain her curiosity, the little girl inquired, *What are you making?*

Pausing, Michaelangelo replied, *There's an angel in there and I must set it free.*

Resurrection faith is like that. It is *seeing the new reality and working to set it free*—in our lives and in the world.

When our eyes are opened, we see the reality that our lives can be, like **Susan Boyle**, the 47-year-old, frizzy-haired, plump and seemingly ordinary woman from a small village in Scotland ... who wowed the world in the U.K. Television show, *Britain's Got Talent*, as she sang *I Dreamed a Dream*.

When she first walked on stage, we're all going, *What is she doing there?* Or, *She's in way over her head*, as Simon Cowell is rolling his eyes. And then she started to sing; and everything changed.

When our eyes are truly opened to the *something more* to which God calls us, who knows to what heights we can soar?

VI.

Friends, the *something more* is always out there—the new awareness, new self-discovery, new conviction in our heart, the new hope.

It's out there. The *something more* is what Job finally came to grasp after an eternity of stubborn conversation and debate with God. *But now my eye sees you*, Job said. *At long last, I get it, and I repent in dust and ashes.*

What God wants in all of this is for resurrection faith to be set loose in the world both in us and through us. That *something more* is possible.

We get there by using our gifts, by lifting up one another and by seeking common ground with all people of all faiths, from whatever nation of the earth.

Let our eyes be opened, as our faith is emboldened.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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