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Our Saviour/St. Stephens  
Easter Sunday  
April 9, 2023

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

That is of course the call and response on this Easter Sunday.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

That is our Christian call and response today, but what are we saying when we declare this?

What are we saying when we say, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed"?

What are we saying, but that we acknowledge that we have had our perspective changed.

We have had our perspective changed.

When we say that call and response, what we are saying is that we believe that one can actually overcome sin and death, that in fact, Christ has come back from the dead.

In short, we are saying that we have had our perspective changed.

But, oh what an effort it is to have one's perspective changed, is it not?

And yet, Friends, this is what Easter is really all about.

It is about having our perspective changed.

But yes, what an effort, what a struggle, what a battle it is to have one's perspective changed.

And yet, this is what Easter is about.

PAUSE

Now, the Gospel writer Matthew would seem to suggest that it was hardly any problem at all for the perspective of the women at the tomb to be changed.

Matthew says that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb.

And these women saw the stone rolled back and an angel of the Lord sitting on the stone.

And then the women are told that Jesus has been raised.

And the angel said, "Go quickly and tell Jesus' disciples that he has been raised."

And how do the women respond?

Do they doubt? Do they question? Do they reject the angel's words?

No, not at all.

The text says, "They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell the disciples."

They are overcome with joy, so much so that they run to tell the disciples.

Oh, what an effort it is to have our perspective changed.

But, not so, with respect to the women at the tomb on that first Easter morning.

No, they accept the angel's words without question and they head off to tell the disciples.

But, in Mark's version of the resurrection, it is a bit different.

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 16, we read a similar story as that found in Matthew's Gospel.

But how do the women at the tomb respond there in that gospel when told to "go and tell the disciples"?

How do the women respond?

They left the tomb, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.

In Mark's Gospel the women's perspective is hardly changed.

In Mark's Gospel the women are afraid, they are confused, they are bewildered, they are terrified.

Some man dressed in a white robe, not necessarily an angel, but some man at the tomb of Jesus tells them that Jesus has been raised, and they run off saying nothing to anyone.

No, in Mark's Gospel, the women's perspective is hardly changed.

"Dead people do not rise from the dead," so the women are probably thinking.

The reality of our world would seem to be pretty clear on that.

I mean when was the last time anyone of us met a man or woman who had been raised from the dead? (Raise hand)

Anyone?

But Easter Sunday does indeed challenge us to change our perspective.

PAUSE

Now, one of my most favorite examples of what it is to have our perspective changed comes from a small book entitled *Flatland* by the English schoolmaster Edwin Abbott.

The book, or short novel really, published in 1884, was a satirical commentary on the hierarchy of Victorian culture.

Pretty high brow, right?

But all that political satire aside, there is an image that emerges from that short novel that I continue to come back to whenever I think about how Easter challenges us to change our perspective.

Let me explain.

In the book, you see, Edwin Abbott describes a two dimensional world populated by two dimensional beings.

So, think of a large flat surface that is comprised of length and width going off in all directions.

But there is no third dimension, no height nor depth in this world, only this two dimensional flat plane.

And in this two dimensional world exists triangles, squares, octagons, and the like, and even circles.

All these two dimensional shapes move and have their being within this two dimensional reality, this flat expanse, this Flatland.

Now, the two dimensional shapes can recognize one another by the edges of the other shapes they come across.

They can recognize triangles by their three sides.

They can recognize squares by their four equal sides.

So on and so forth.

They can even recognize their fellow circles by the shading of their edge, the curvature of circles.

So, all these shapes are going about their regular, everyday, two dimensional lives within Flatland, when suddenly these two dimensional shapes witness something most unusual in their world.

Within their two dimensional world they see something suddenly appear that completely baffles them.

It is a point they see, that then expands into a circle of ever increasing size, which then diminishes in size back down to a single point, and then disappears again altogether.

A point that expands into a widening circle only to diminish and disappear.

And the shapes in Flatland don't know what to make of it.

But it is not long before the residents of Flatland realize what it is that they have seen.

A three dimensional sphere has passed through their two dimensional world.

And if we can envision for ourselves what it would look like for a sphere to pass through a two dimensional plane, we quickly get the picture.

We would see first just a point on the plane, where the sphere first just touches the plane, and then we would see a circle form of increasing size, which would then diminish and disappear again.

And Edwin Abbott's description here in his short novel, is a brilliant example of what it is to have our perspective changed.

For the resident shapes of Flatland realize that their two dimensional world is not all there is.

There is also something called "Spaceland" which contains three dimensions.

Now, I don't know if the analogy holds water with respect to our understanding of God's reality.

I don't know if we can say absolutely that we are kind of like the shapes in Flatland, and Jesus is like the sphere that has passed through our world and has upended our perspective of reality.

I don't know if that fits, because after all we are talking about a short novel, an analogy from a writer's imagination.

But, the point remains that Easter does indeed challenge us to change our perspective.

But oh how difficult it is to change one's perspective.

For after all, how do WE communicate to another person the magnitude of Easter.

At first, it would seem that to say "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" would hardly do the trick.

That certainly captures the essence of the change in perspective, but does it really have the impact on another person?

For the ordinary, everyday person, who does not believe, saying "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" would seem to fall short.

Yes, it might take a little more than that, and mind you, even then the non-believer may not be convinced.

PAUSE

But, let's think again about the image from Edwin Abbott.

Let's think again about the sphere passing through the two dimensional plane.

And let's consider not what happens externally, outside of us, as much as what happens internally, what happens inside of us.

Because the resurrection power of Christ does not JUST change the world around us, renewing all of creation...

No, the resurrection power of Christ not only changes the world, it changes us from within, or at least it should.

Think of it like this, the resurrection power of Christ does not just pass through our world, it passes through us, and it resides in us, so as to change us, to remake us into a new creation of God.

And so that should be evident in who we are...

...that change in us should be evident in how we live day to day...

...that change in us should be evident in how we interact with other people, how we relate to our friends, our family, our neighbors, and the strangers we meet for the first time...

...that change in us should be evident in how we experience life, how we see the world, how we understand the goal and purpose of the universe...

And maybe the call and response of Easter seems cliché, maybe it seems like it is just something nice we Christians do on Easter because we are supposed to do it.

Maybe it takes a little more than saying those words to affect a change in others, or even in us.

Maybe it requires us to say "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" over and over and over again to the point of *ad nauseum* so as to impacts us and others.

PAUSE

A friend at seminary use to say to me, "If you act enthusiastic, you'll be enthusiastic."

If you act enthusiastic, you'll be enthusiastic. And I would dare say that we can extrapolate this truth, to the call and response of which we are talking about.

If you say, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" over and over again it will reinforce that truth for you.

You will live that truth. You will embody that truth. And, you will be that truth for others.

That is why I think there is great value in exchanging those words with one another. Those words do affect us.

It changes our perspective, or if our perspective has already been changed, it reinforces that perspective.

PAUSE

So today, Friends, we have witnessed again the resurrection of Christ our Lord.

We have seen the sphere move through the plane.

And it may be befuddling to us. It may even be terrifying to us.

We may wonder what was that.

But in the midst of our confusion, and even in the midst of our doubt, let us boldly say, over and over, again...

Christ is risen! He has risen indeed! Amen. Alleluia.