



Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

Faith's Fair Vision

The Reverend Dr. John A. Dalles
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Matthew 28:1-10

Sir Thomas Beecham, the celebrated conductor of the London Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic orchestras, once saw a distinguished-looking woman in the foyer of a Manchester hotel.

Believing he knew her, but unable to remember her name, he paused to talk with her. As the two chatted, he vaguely recollected that she had a brother.

Hoping for a clue, he asked how her brother was, and whether he was still working at the same job.

"Oh, he is very well," she said. "And still king."

On Easter Morning, we talk about Jesus in the same way.

"Oh, he is very well ... and still King."

The agents of Rome had done their worst. The soldiers who stripped Him and beat Him, who mocked Him with jeers and a crown of thorns, had done their worst. The long burdensome way of carrying that heavy cross along the Via Dolorosa had done its worst. The wounds of the nails, the spear thrust into His side; the hours in the hot sun; the taunts of the crowds, and the unrepentant thief — **all of them had combined to destroy Him.**

After they had placed His lifeless body into the rock-cut tomb; after they rolled the gigantic stone into place to seal it; after the governor had posted guards all around, and the night had fallen — we, too, might have accepted the idea that it was really over, that the spark of hope and compassion that had been Jesus of Nazareth had been snuffed out completely, never more to be seen or heard.

But, on Easter morning, we proclaim:

"Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. He is very well ... and still King."

On that first Easter morning, they went to the garden of His tomb; saw the stone rolled back; peered into the empty tomb; trembled, doubted, and wondered. As we come to our own Easter Day, we have to pass their way — through betrayal and sorrow, death and defeat — to meet the risen Christ.

It happened on the third day.

Faith's fair vision says, from here to eternity, it is always the third day.

It is easy to forget the miraculous truth of Easter, to think that bad things are always going to get worse. We turn on the news, and we feel that way. We hear about robberies and shootings, about unscrupulous public officials, and people on the take. Lately, we hear of pandemics and the problems they bring. We allow ourselves to be fooled into thinking that the stone has not been rolled away from the tomb. We may be tempted to think that Jesus died in disgrace, and that is the end of the story.

At such a moment we need to hear the words of our Easter hymn:

"Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son; endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won!"

What does that **endless** victory look like? Like this:

Jeremy Forrester was born with a twisted body, a slow mind, and a chronic, terminal illness that had been slowly killing him all his young life. Still, his parents had tried to give him as normal a life as possible and had sent him to St. Theresa's Elementary School.

At the age of 13, Jeremy was still in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, drool, and make grunting noises.

At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness. Most of the time, however, Jeremy irritated his teacher. Doris tried to sympathize with the Forresters. After all, their only child had a terminal illness.

As she pondered the situation, she prayed, "Oh God, here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared with that poor family! Please help me to be more patient with Jeremy."

From that day on, she tried to live into her prayer.

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then, to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg.

She said, "Please, take this home. Bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Miller!" the children responded enthusiastically.

The next morning, all nineteen children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in a large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they did their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs.

In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. A small girl waved her arms. "That's my egg, Miss Miller."

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." One of the children smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine!"

Next, Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. One of the children spoke up from the back of the classroom, "My daddy helped me!" he beamed.

Then Doris opened the fourth egg.

There was nothing in the egg.

Miss Miller did not want to embarrass anyone, so she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another.

Suddenly, Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?"

Flustered, Doris replied, "*But Jeremy — your egg is empty!*" He looked into her eyes and said softly, "**Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty too!**"

Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him, "*Do you know why the tomb was empty?*"

"*Oh, yes!*" Jeremy exclaimed. "*Jesus was killed and put in there. Then His Father raised Him up!*"

The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the schoolyard, Doris cried.

Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects were surprised to see on top of his casket nineteen eggs — **all of them empty.** †

† *What Was in Jeremy's Egg and Other Stories* is available from Nascent Press, 2137 Otis Drive, #302, Alameda, CA 94501.

We all want to experience an Easter moment — a time when what we thought had died was actually alive and well; when what we thought was over had a new chapter to tell; when what we thought was the end of the trail was actually a shift in direction that leads to a place we have been seeking, all along.

We all want to experience an Easter moment, when the fears of the past are reduced to nothingness — as empty as the empty tomb — and the love that is to be found in God shines like the first rays of morning.

It is *faith's fair vision* in the risen Christ.

We all want to experience an Easter moment, because there have been so many moments that are so unlike Easter. As a result, we may have become weary, or disappointed, or angry. We may have decided that ahead lies only gloom and doom. We may have allowed that attitude to pervade our being, so that we go about life in a perpetual twilight of disagreeableness.

In contrast, we need *faith's fair vision* in the risen Christ.

We all want to experience an Easter moment. We have forgotten that our best days, no matter how good they have been, are only a prelude to what comes next. We long to know the wonder and surprise and joy and hopefulness that only Easter can bring.

So take time — a little time — to open yourself to the moment of Easter: the moment when Jesus appears whole and well, right before you; the Easter moment when death is done, and sin has no power; the Easter moment when new life begins.

You see, the Easter moment is offered as freely as the air you breathe. So breathe it in. Savor of its goodness; take it as a gift. It is yours.

***Faith's fair vision* in the risen Christ looks like this:**

For you, Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Jesus is alive forevermore. Because He lives, you can live also, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

All who trust in Jesus refuse to give in to the notion that there is no hope, because we know the truth: Jesus has been to death and back. Jesus is alive forevermore. Jesus is here to walk with you every step of the way. Jesus will speak the truth to you about what really matters. Jesus will show you what you need to see about the Kingdom of God.

"He is very well ... and still King."

Jesus speaks the redeeming Word. Jesus offers the hopeful Way. Jesus shares the everlasting promise. Jesus will always be King.

And so, you will say: ***"I choose hope. I choose to believe. I choose love."***

Because you trust what Jesus promises: ***"I am the resurrection and the life."***

Amen.