

4.20.2025 Easter Day (John 20:1-10)

There's an essay titled *One Solitary Life* which was part of a sermon preached by the Reverend James Allen Francis in 1926. In this essay, Francis wrote these words about Jesus, he said, "Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman... He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college... He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

"While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed on a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen (now 20) long centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress. I am well within the mark when I say that all of the armies that have ever marched, all of the navies that were ever built, all of the parliaments that ever sat and all of the kings that have ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life."

It is well within the mark to make such a bold statement about the effect of Jesus' life and ministry on this world. Consider the historical evidence and you'll find Jesus to be the dividing line in human history. Before Christ the sick and the suffering were largely ignored, after Christ we see the early Church following His example of caring for and healing the sick through the construction of the first hospitals. Before Christ unwanted newborn children were often abandoned and left to die from exposure, starvation, or being torn apart by animals, after Christ we see the early Christians rescuing and caring for those babies, viewing them as gifts from God. Before Christ people of a different race, women, the poor, and the outcast were discriminated against and excluded, after Christ "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ*

Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

We live in a world that has been turned toward love, love for God and one another, in countless ways by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, but if we were to step back 2,000 years to the days surrounding that first Easter morning, we’d find that even the closest followers of Jesus were still blind to such an outcome. They didn’t have eyes to see what history now has shown us. They didn’t even have eyes to recognize the One who called them friends. Mary Magdalene believed someone had taken our Lord’s dead body out of the tomb, and therefore when Jesus appeared to her, she thought He was the gardener, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were also certain about Jesus’ death being the bitter end of all they’d hoped for, thought Jesus was just another traveler as He walked with them, and when our Lord came to His disciples who were huddled in an upper room mourning His death, *“they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit”* (Luke 24:37).

After the unimaginable tragedy of our Savior’s Passion and death, even His closest followers were initially blinded to the glory of the Risen Christ. They were unable to see Him because their hearts and minds were consumed by the trials and sorrows of this world, and their inability to recognize Him, people who’d walked and talked and lived with Him, reveals to us how quickly the heartache we too often confront in this fallen world can blind a person, preventing us from recognizing the resurrected glory of our Risen King, keeping us from taking hold of the abundant, risen life that is found only in Him.

On the first Easter, our Lord’s closest disciples struggled to lift up their eyes to see Him, and knowing that this is a difficulty we all face in this world, St. Paul encourages Christians to confront that challenge by setting our affection *“on things above.”* In our Easter Epistle, St. Paul tells us to *“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:1-2). These inspired words bring to mind a quote from C.S. Lewis, who wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” For Lewis, Christianity was like the sun above, not only an objective truth that could be

seen, but also the light and the truth by which all things are seen and properly understood, and on this Easter Day I wonder if Lewis would allow us to apply his thought about Christianity to the Resurrection, saying, I believe in the Resurrection as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

Like the sun illuminates this world, allowing our eyes to see earthly things, the Resurrection of our Lord illuminates the world to come, giving us eyes to see the things of heaven (John 3:12). This truth is revealed in the example of every disciple who was initially unable to recognize our Risen Lord, but perhaps especially in the text of our Gospel lesson. This morning we learned that after Mary Magdalene told Peter and John that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb, that they ran, and John *"reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet (until then NLT) they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead"* (John 20:4-9).

Until then they did not understand... Even after three years of walking, talking, and living with our Lord... Even after Jesus publicly (John 2:18-22; Mt. 12:39-40), and privately (Mt. 16:21), declared the truth that He would suffer, die, and rise again... Even after *"all that the prophets have spoken"* (Luke 24:25), the signs and wonders and repeated claims of Divinity... Even after all this and so much more, St. John tells us that it wasn't until he beheld the empty tomb, *the linen cloths lying there*, and the face cloth *folded up in a place by itself*, that he saw, and believed. The Resurrection changed everything. Before the Resurrection, *they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead*, but in light of the Resurrection, by the grace of God St. John was finally able to lift up his eyes, to see, and believe. Like the sun illuminates this world, allowing our eyes to see earthly things, the Resurrection of our Lord illuminates the world to come, giving us eyes to see the things of heaven.

The example in our Gospel text, and that of Jesus' closest disciples struggling

in their sorrow to set their affection “*on things above,*” to lift up their eyes to see the Risen Christ, certainly parallels our own experience. We know, from our historical, 21st century perspective, without a doubt “that all of the armies that have ever marched, all of the navies that were ever built, all of the parliaments that ever sat and all of the kings that have ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.” We’ve walked with Him for years, searched the Scriptures, witnessed countless miracles, but somehow we still have our moments when we allow this world to cloud the light and the truth of the Risen Christ. Perhaps it was such a struggle that led the psalmist to cry out to God, “*O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me; Let them bring me to Thy holy hill, And to Thy dwelling places*” (Psalm 43:3).

God has sent out His light and His truth, for the Resurrection is not only a historical truth that we see, it is also the light and the truth by which we see and understand everything else, and this means Easter isn’t just a day to celebrate the fact that the Lord is Risen. Instead, Easter is our Savior’s invitation to enter into His risen life, to see and understand and make sense of all things in this world, and the world to come, through the light and truth of the Resurrection.

God made the sun rise this morning that we may see and perceive the visible world. He didn’t want us stumbling around in the dark, and by His grace and merciful lovingkindness, two thousand years ago, God’s only-begotten Son rose, conquering sin and death, reconciling us to the Father, and providing us with light and truth to see and understand “all things visible and invisible.” So, don’t stumble around in the dark, look to the Risen Son, let His light and His truth lead you, and bring you to His holy hill, to the place where He dwells.