

Sermon – Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

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Three people came to the tomb searching for Jesus – John, Mary, and Peter. All three found that He had Risen and been made anew. Yet each one came to that realization in their own time and their own way. Once they realized that Christ had Risen, they were also transformed and lived a new way because of that resurrection.

John comes to the tomb, and as soon as he enters, he understands that Jesus has Risen. At least, that's the way He describes it in his own Gospel. This realization changes John, who refers to himself as the apostle whom Jesus loved. Focusing on love represents a change in attitude for John, who was dubbed a Son of Thunder because of his temper. The power of the Resurrection changed John's focus from anger to love. The power of the Resurrection changed John.

When Mary first comes to the tomb, she thinks Jesus's body has been stolen. In New Testament days, the Jews considered death a year-long process. The flesh disintegrated, and Jews believed this disintegration was how the dead person's sins were cleansed so that they would be prepared for the afterlife. The mourning process continued throughout the year. Typically, when someone was executed, the Sanhedrin would place their body in a particular place and oversee this purification process, which was believed to be painful. So, perhaps Mary thought that the Sanhedrin had taken Jesus's body to the special place reserved for those executed.

When Mary returns to the tomb, Jesus calls her name. At that moment, she turns to Him, realizing who He is. She changes. Instead of considering her task to be a memorial act for Jesus, she realizes it is a call to be a missionary to the Good News. She answers Jesus's call to go and tell his followers that He is Risen. In doing so, she becomes the first missionary. The power of the Resurrection changes Mary.

Peter observes the scene at the tomb but doesn't seem to understand right away. However, he understands later, as we can see from his sermon to Cornelius in Acts. Peter goes from being an impetuous person to a thoughtful and inclusive one who spreads the Gospel. He realizes that God loves all people equally and that Jesus came to deliver all people. The power of the Resurrection makes Peter a new person.

Now let's talk about us.

Phillips Brooks was an Episcopal priest and bishop probably best known for writing the lyrics to O Little Town of Bethlehem. Here's what he writes about what the Resurrection means for us.

“The great Easter truth is not that we are to live newly after death, but that we are to be new **here and now** by the power of the Resurrection.”

In our faith, we realize that the Resurrection means that when our loved one dies, they become a new person who lives eternally with Jesus. But sometimes, we forget what Bishop Brooks points out here. We forget that the power of the Resurrection makes us

new people here and now. It presents us with a calling, just like the calling given to John, Mary, and Peter. We are called to live differently. We are called to be new people. The power of the resurrection also enables and empowers us to live into that call. The Resurrection makes us new people.

As part of being new people, we are called to see the world's pain and try to alleviate it. We are to see those in need and help them. We are to love all people, including those who mistreat us. We are to forgive. We are to look at how Jesus lived and model our lives after Him. Rather than running from evil and suffering, we are to engage with it and find a way to transmute it for constructive ends. We are called to go out into the community to meet their needs.

The call to discipleship is difficult because it often means going against our instincts and fighting wrongdoing. Yet we have the power to live into this call because of the Resurrection. Because of the Resurrection, we are changed and created anew, just as John, Mary, and Peter were. Because of the Resurrection, we can have new life in Jesus now, as well as in the life hereafter.

James Doetis Roberts is an African-American theologian. He describes the transformation for us through Jesus's resurrection in this way:

"The Easter story, rightly understood, enables us to engage evil and suffering, transmute it for constructive ends, and move forward in hope to God's future and our own."

We are called to do everything we can to ease suffering and bring hope to a disillusioned and weary world. We can do that through the power of the Resurrection. Jesus lives so that we are made new and can work in Jesus's name to renew the world.