

Easter for Our Time

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Reading – Luke 24:1-5

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Sermon

Why it was wonderful; Why, all at
once there were leaves,
Leaves at the end of a dry stick,
small alive
Leaves out of wood. It was
wonderful,
You can't imagine. They came by the
wood path
And the earth loosened the earth
relaxed, there were flowers
Out of the earth! Think of it! And
oak trees
Oozing new green at the tips of them
and flowers
Squeezed out of clay, soft flowers,
limp
Stalks flowering. Well, it was like a
dream,
It happened so quickly, all of a
sudden
It happened.

The poet Archibald Macleish opens or re-opens our eyes to the miracle of spring, this year the spring we thought would never come, the spring about which we may still have some doubts.

Even better than a poem though: I have heard reports – perhaps you have too – of emerging crocuses, of yellow at the tips of willows. I’ve heard – I expect you have too – actual birdsong every morning for weeks now.

The annual miracle is indeed underway, even though this year it may be more “mud-lucious” than usual in E.E. Cummings’ wonderful coined word; yes spring *is* underway, underfoot, and all around us... so, as Cummings wrote elsewhere, we could choose to:

sing) for it’s spring

irrevocably;
and in
earth sky trees
:every
where a miracle arrives

(yes)

you and I may not
hurry it with
a thousand poems
my darling
but nobody will stop it

With All the Policemen In The world.

Robert Kimball says of these lines, that “mister Cummings writes of Spring – or is the writing of Love, of a cosmic restlessness shared and known in the human soul, or is the writing of Yes?”

When I titled this sermon “Easter for Our Time” I was in some measure thinking of the particular challenges we face on the planet in our time, and the need therefore for particular sorts of awakenings in our time, the need for a fresh “yes!” to life.

I spoke about some of this last year on Easter Sunday, spoke of the need to awaken...

to awaken from the sleep of ignorance of our true nature...

to awaken from the belief that a never-ending accumulation of things and money and experiences will bring enduring happiness and not just passing pleasure...

to awaken from the shared belief that economic growth defined by GDP and a rising stock market will solve all our problems...

to awaken from the belief that an ever expanding military with tentacles otherwise known as bases will ensure enduring security rather than enduring enemies...

(What would Jesus have thought of such propositions....?)

Rather... to awaken *to* the realization that our true nature is not as isolated ego-selves, but as sisters and brothers woven into the fabric of all life and dependent for health and well-being on care for all life, for the earth, the soil, the water, the air, care not exploitation, and so compassion, kindness, justice, love.

In Luke the words we heard were “Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

Really good question, isn’t it. And not just 2,000 years ago, but as relevant as ever today, well beyond any literal reading.

On a pretty elemental level to begin with, we need seek the living by getting outside more often to begin with, to breathe outside air, to see outside *living* creatures and trees and... everything! And we need to be with actual flesh and blood *living* human beings more often, away from all of our screens – screens which, for all the miracle of digital technology, are actually (remember?) inert elements, not living, breathing human beings you can touch and hug, not living breathing creatures and grass and trees and flowers.

In other words, we need to seek life where life actually is, to re-awaken on Easter and always to the actual world in which we live and move and have our being, and to the reality that our material nourishment comes from this actual living material world that must be cared for in order to continue to nourish us; and that our spiritual nourishment comes not from surrounding ourselves with more stuff, but by giving away care and kindness that will come back around to us – for it really is, paraphrasing the St. Francis Prayer, “in giving that we receive” and it really is in dying to the illusion of separate self that we are born to a mystery we can call eternal life.

Well... this all may begin to sound kind of abstract. Nice enough, but too general.

This sentiment from the writer, farmer, and social prophet Wendell Berry may help bring it closer down to earth. He reminds us in a recent essay that “The future does not exist until it has become the past.” Which confirms Jesus’ admonition, Berry says, to “take no thought for the morrow.” But well then, Berry asks, “How will we be *prepared* for the morrow?”

He writes – and here is the down to earth affirmation:

I am not an accredited interpreter of Scripture, but taking thought for the morrow is a waste of time, I believe, because all we can do to prepare rightly for tomorrow is to do the right things today.

I love that!

And Berry goes on to name many of the right sorts of things we can and ought to be doing today when it comes to proper care of the soil and water and air; and it is a list which we could easily enough expand to include proper care for one another, for our relationships, for our communities.

An Easter for our time, in other words, is no different in spirit from an Easter for any time. The particulars differ from age to age, from person to person, and from time to time in our individual lives, since the particular realities of our lives change from time to time, person to person.

But the principle remains: Awakening to how things actually are in our lives and in the world, and then acting appropriately – doing the right thing – in response to how things actually are, with kindness, care, compassion, and love. For “all we can do to prepare rightly for tomorrow is to do the right things today.”

A few of May Sarton’s words from her poem “Easter Morning” are also relevant here as a kind of prayer or admonition or reminder of how we would like to be in the world – today, Easter, and every day:

I prayed for delicate love and difficult
That all be gentle now and know no fault...

...I would be gentler still if that I could,

...Wait
When all is so in peril, so delicate.

I’m reminded here of the physician’s Hippocratic Oath, which begins “First, do no harm.”

Then, I would add: Pay attention. Love. Act accordingly. Today. Which is the only day we ever have.

Let me close with this thought.

Spring does happen with no prodding from us, a seeming miracle, as Archibald Macleish so wondrously expressed. Yet the spring-times and Easters of our souls and of our lives are not so guaranteed. This means we often must help them along, which we can do.

In this spirit, a colleague once shared a personal story of what he called an Eastering. He once had a beautiful Siamese fighting fish kept in a small bowl. One morning he found the fish floating on the surface; he seemed perhaps to have died. But

my colleague moved the bowl to a warmer, sunlit spot on the table. And as the water warmed the fish began to stir, and soon was swimming about as if nothing had happened.

It was indeed an Eastering – for the fish would have died had my colleague done nothing. Yet he provided the conditions for life’s renewal – the sun and the life-force within the fish did the rest.

In this spirit, may we each and all be partners with the renewing spirit life every day, awakening with gratitude to the wonder of the beauties of each day, of the beauties of each person in our lives, each person we pass on the street; awakening to the possibilities of “Eastering” – which means living the love that does indeed rest in our hearts... caring for one another, caring for the earth.

Which may simply be by helping to provide the conditions for one another for life’s renewal – perhaps simply by being the warming sun for another. And it is there in such meeting that we might find the risen Christ in our awakened hearts.

May we, then, awaken ever more, this Easter, this spring, always.
Yes.

So may it be.