

Easter Day

"Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'"  
In the name...

3.

"The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning. And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write about them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

The concluding paragraph of Clives Staples Lewis' great Narnia series, and among the most heartening reflections on Christian doctrine I have yet found—all of seminary included! The baptized are an odd group of people, friends. They have too much hope when you give them a pen. Too much love when you give them pain. And I want an account. I want to know why C.S. Lewis writes this stuff.

Today is an odd day, dear friends. The one whom we put to death three days ago, is now standing in our midst. In Genesis, God creates a world, commissions Adam to name a rolodex of animals, causes Adam to sleep the sleep of death, and resurrects a church on the other side—her name is Eve. In the Gospels, Jesus creates a Kingdom, is commissioned to rename the names—stone temples become the Temple of his body; bread and wine become body and blood; He then offers himself to death, and resurrects a church on the other side—her name is the City of God. But let us be clear about the resurrection for a moment: a staged resurrection would have us all playing church this morning—passing around some tasteless biscuits in hopes of ameliorating some guilt that we're not doing enough. That's not the testimony of Scripture. This is real. We don't get happy lions, friends, from tasteless biscuits. Lewis is after something far deeper than managing his British guilt. He wants transformation. He wants to live forever. He wants a new body. This is real.

5.

And the message is entrusted to the women who stood afar off at the foot of the cross. You remember the three Mary's—his mother, his mother's cousin Mary, and Mary Magdala. When all the rest had fled, there they stood. And when no one had yet awoken, they came to the tomb in the dark. I can't say I'm all that surprised. The pots and pans of my childhood, which functioned as something of an alarm clock for me, were that of my mother preparing for another day. Not a few times I've arrived at church only to find a lady already preparing coffee hour or bulletins. I've arrived at school campus before at 6:30 in the morning, only to realize that ~~one~~ one of our school principal's had already been there for an hour. So often they are the first and the last, and to them shall the announcement of the resurrection be entrusted. Our cues are from them.

the smells

4.  
Resurrection  
is the  
day  
of Creation

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baptistry  
Duomo

Why are  
people  
spending  
100-  
years  
building

an  
8-  
sided  
building  
1000 yrs  
ago?

Why happy  
lions?

And today, Mary plays the part of a new Eve. The new Adam Jesus has taken the thorns and thistles of the curse to his very forehead, and will now therefore be crowned King of the world. And he awakes from the sleep of death in a Garden to put an exclamation point at the end his prophetic sentence. The world is made anew. Eden is reborn. Sin, ignorance, and death no longer get the last say.

"Supposing him to be the gardener..." The great gardener of the first garden was God himself, so her mistake perfects irony as the greatest form of humor, for he is....! If ever there was a gardener, it is Jesus...God...and so He is. What she does not yet realize is that she is the first-fruits of the great garden of the Church that he has now planted in a tomb and resurrected as a Kingdom of priests.

This is why he says such an odd statement, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." He wants her to know that he enjoys full equality with the Father. St Augustine writes, "Touching concludes as it were the process of getting acquainted. He did not want this heart, so eagerly reaching out to him, to stop at thinking that he was only what could be seen and touched. His ascension to the Father signified his being seen in his equality with the Father, that being the ultimate vision which suffices us." "For the fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is none else, is this: to enjoy God the three in whose image we were made."

Mary's happiness—your happiness—is in the contemplation of God as God. To know God, to see God in his beauty and essential perfections, to simply gaze upon God.

2. And can I say how much I love the subdued drama. Once upon a time in an empty garden in the capital city of a tiny country which had been overthrown (Jerusalem), a man disappeared from a tomb and left the burial clothes staged as if he were still in them. But he wasn't. His running disciples are left scratching heads until a group of women talk to some angels and a gardener (wink wink). Herod is still passed out with a hangover. Caesar is planning his next execution party. The world is asleep at the wheel, and yet resurrection breaks forth on the side of a hill. The subdued drama is so fantastic. Revolution has begun, and no one bears so much as a weapon.

Now let us be clear, dear friends. There is sin and brokenness in this world. Fear, prejudice, intolerance, wild injustice and inequity, and sin. Jesus didn't stage a drama for our inspiration. Jesus didn't stage a concert to which we bring our lighters and candles. Jesus didn't show up fashionably late to an already-great party. He came to raise the dead.

Massive doctrine, which leads to heightened and beautiful truths—the greatest of which is this. Your relationship to everything in this world—God first and all the way down is grace, grace, unerring grace. Your relationship to your friends and enemies is now grace. Your relationship to politics and paying bills is now grace. Your relationship to taxes and ~~Myler reports~~ <sup>polling of the US people</sup> is now grace. Whether in triumph or in tiredness, it is grace all the way down. The body of sin no longer has a hold on you. The body of Christ now envelopes you. And so to this altar of grace

10 "Do not be afraid"

Lose Yourself In the name ..

So here's our life in God, friends – a comprehensive wisdom deposit that steepens members in the recorded fundamentals of a virtue tradition with God as their prize, the world as their wonder garden, the cross as their consolation, their language-liturgy a renaming of the world, Holy Scripture as their story, the Blessed Sacrament as their spiritual energy, the Baptism bath as their unquestioned inclusion.

~~The pregnant cave is empty this evening. Love has rushed out, and love looks like something very real and physical—Jesus the light of the world. Rome's slave, Jesus, who was a prisoner of the state, 'tried' by the state, tortured by the state, and killed by the state has shown us that He is not of this world--the world could never fully contain him, Rome's chains were never all that threatening; nor could the rules of death and despair that the world offers its inhabitants restrain him. This is not in disregard to the world—it's to remake it.~~

So what are the circumstances of world renewal? Do I need an Iowa caucus? Maybe some Apache helicopters? Maybe world renewal is romantic? If we could just go back to 18<sup>th</sup>-century America, all would be well with religion, right?

Here's where Scripture begins world renewal: A Palestinian garden with a cave. The earth gives its earthquake announcement that new life now ushers forth from its depths. Resurrection will not be top down; it will be ground up and therefore capture rocks, weeds, flowers, planets, and galaxies with the Church to boot. ~~The brightness of glory is the first noticed—lightning is his face~~ And the first victim of resurrection – fear. DO NOT BE AFRAID. Might I add – of anything. These women who are midwives to the cave heard his sermon on the mount. When he says, "Do not be afraid", their minds return to a place now two-years removed:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup>Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life<sup>28</sup>?

<sup>28</sup>"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

You were once afraid for your next meal. I shall give you my body. You were once afraid for your next outfit – I shall clothe you in lightning. You were once afraid that you wouldn't raise you kids in the right way. My kingdom belongs to children. You were once required to deal

with all of life in terms of 'worry'—in full knowledge that not a single hour was added to your life because of it. I now give you the birds as witness of the Gospel and forever free you from worry. The birds have neither bunker nor barn. And yet your Father feeds them. You once feared Rome and therefore told lies for the sake of survival. I now give you a Kingdom that puts an expiration date on Rome, and my Peter shall remake Nero's precious Vatican Hill as a permanent place for worship of a loving God.

*We can now tell the truth.*

So what are we up against? This year? Maybe the paralysis that comes from a culture defined by shame and fear. But you are free. The freedom is total. You may now walk in love.

7. Either way, welcome to the party for the baptized, dear friends. The party for those, as Paul says, who are "dead to sin and alive to God."

Let us be clear, dear friends. There is sin and brokenness in this world. Fear, prejudice, intolerance, wild injustice and inequity, and sin. Jesus didn't stage a flash mob for some Facebook likes. Jesus didn't show up fashionably late to an already-great party. He came to raise the dead. The things that hurt the most need the rescue to come from the deepest places. (It would be insulting to people in their hour of grief to say, "God can't do a thing about this except give you really warm feelings about love." Instead, it's reassuring to know that love conquers even the thing that we find most unconquerable – which is death. And if death can be reversed, well then....so can everything else. If even death can be reversed, then the only thing left in this world is hope.)

*reversed  
reversed*

Massive doctrine, which leads to heightened and beautiful truths—the greatest of which is this. At this altar, your relationship to everything in this world—God first and all the way down is grace, grace, unerring grace. Your relationship to your friends and enemies is now grace. Your relationship to politics and paying bills is now grace. Your relationship to taxes and tariffs is now grace. Whether in triumph or in tiredness, it is grace all the way down. The body of sin no longer has a hold on you. The body of Christ now envelopes you. And so to this altar of grace we now turn with heads held high—for our redemption draws nigh. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.

8.

God did not construct a rescue operation that left the Almighty

unscathed. God had skin the game, and we are not speaking metaphorically. God did not create creatures of space and time, and then withdraw yet further still. God entered into both, for both are found within God. God did not create humans and then abscond into the atmospheric places of the spirit realm with a hefty bit of pain-absent distance to dodge the curse. God instead become human. God did not observe with perfect omniscience the ache, tragedy, and devastation of a world that promotes the kinds of wars that forever take the lives of even children, and then roll a grenade of damnation under the door to wrap things up. Instead, God took on the kinds of bones that could be broken, the kind of muscle tissue that could be torn from his back, and the kind of body that has enough blood to bleed out, and determined not to be a paper-mache kind of numinous God, but that kind of God that you could nail to a dead tree and laugh at.

And lest we think for a moment that reveling in the torture scenes will help us finally make sense of the *ordo salutis*, God bless you. It's quite a mystery, but it's a mystery that Isaiah is at least willing to frame from a distance, lest we miss grace and instead get crushed in rational sorting.


Today's call is to embrace the Christ of affliction rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Today's call is to esteem the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all treasures of this world because of a view to the reward; the reward of those people who have here in this world no lasting city: only one Society is given the promise of ultimate change--the prevailing against hell. Only one City is given the promise of hope and justice. Only one King is placing enemies under footstools. Only one People are militant in the cause of righting the wrongs of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have only one Head, though we are many. We are initiated and marked by the bath of Christ. We call it baptism. We all talk the same way. We call it our liturgy. And we all read the same authors. We call it Scripture. We all partake the same meal. We call it Communion. Friends, here we have no lasting city, but we seek **that** city which is to come. Therefore, let us go outside the camp and bear the reproach that Christ endured. Humiliation before exaltation; wilderness wandering before Promised Land. A move away from comfort and toward need. This is not a story of man and him improved. This is the story of Christ and him crucified and resurrected.

Final comments. Jesus' last words are, "I thirst", or "I am thirsty."

we now turn with heads held high—for our redemption draws nigh. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.

Jesus enters into a tribal world of divisions with the pure milk of his Gospel of sin-eradication and reconciliation. Into a world that prizes greed and bases friendships upon it, he declares that there is neither rich nor poor in the Kingdom of heaven. All are rich in Christ. Into a world that preys upon fear and instability, he declares peace, for we have NOTHING to fear in a Kingdom of perpetual joy. Into a world that places 20-foot walls around every difference that we can find, he brings Jericho destruction to those walls by saying, there is neither Jew nor Greek—but all are One in Christ. The church exists in part to show the foolishness of this world's attempt at assuring you that the world would be a far better place if everyone was just like you. But you're not the cornerstone—He is. Oh, there's conformity in this world. It is conformity to a crucified Savior who said Rome's world system simply won't do. I give myself for the life of the world. And the difference is not your genius in joining arms with Jesus. The difference is mercy.

Jesus this morning teaches us the very essence of love by giving us resurrection. In doing so, he places the essence of religion exactly where it should be so as to leave no confusion about its purpose in our lives and in this world. First notice what religion is NOT:

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1. Jesus does not say that religion is, in the end, God's affirmation of your already well-lived lives that he honors with a biscuit and a splash of wine at the end.
  2. Jesus does not say that religion is, in the end, the best organized attempt at starting lots of non-profits.
  3. Jesus does not say that religion is, in the end, the best way to kick bad habits.
  4. Jesus does not say that religion is, in the end, the best way to teach your kids good habits.

And while those things may flow out of religion and have overlap, religion is nothing without love, and senseless without a cosmic initiator—God. Religion is the beautiful tapestry of worldwide orphans (Jesus' word) responding to the love of God that is ours in resurrection. And notice that the love of God is very specific. It originates in God. God is a community, or our own community is senseless; no, it doesn't even exist! It is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that alone can be the wellspring of your own love for your babies. God had already loved himself for all of eternity. He loved his ever-begotten Son in whom dwells all the richness of Deity. His Love so perfect, that the Love is very God itself—the Holy Spirit. The God who was, is, and ever will be a Triune community spilled over one day, and we call it earth. The God who was, is, and every will be a Triune community spilled over one day, and we call it humanity. The God who was, is, and ever will be a Triune community spilled over one day, and we call it the Church. Here's how Jesus describes it this morning: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." Here's how Jesus describes it this morning: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." And again, here's how Jesus describes it this

morning: "You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you....to be with you forever."

The Trinity IS love. You are in the Trinity. Therefore, love. Doctrine is not esoteric and dry. Doctrine is the very wellspring of love. It is in that love that we keep his commandments. It is in that love that we cultivate new habits of love and purpose. It is in that love that we serve those in need. It is in that love that we disciple our children. But the essence is LOVE. Women and men fully alive to the love of God—therein lies the glory of our great God.

10.

And at this altar, we respond to his most loving and important commandment of all—to feast upon his love. To feast upon his person. To feast upon this Triune community who was, and is, and ever shall be WORLD WITHOUT END, Amen. A blessed Easter this truly is—resurrection has won. You are now one with the God of the universe.

In the name...