



FROM THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR:

EASTER IS THE GREATEST AND THE OLDEST OF CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS, THE "FEAST OF FEASTS" AS POPE LEO THE GREAT CALLED IT EARLY IN THE FIFTH CENTURY. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN REGARDED AS THE CHIEF AND MOST JOYOUS OF THE OBSERVANCE OF THE CHURCH, AS THE COMMEMORATION OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND THE RESTORATION OF LIFE TO THE WORLD WHICH SIN HAD SOILED. ITS IMPORTANCE IS INDICATED IN THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR BY THE LONG PERIOD OF PREPARATION OF LENT AND PASSIONTIDE, BY THE SPECIAL OBSERVANCES OF HOLY WEEK AND BY THE FOLLOWING EASTERTIDE BETWEEN EASTER AND PENTECOST.

JOHN 20: "THEN WENT IN ALSO THAT OTHER DISCIPLE WHICH CAME TO THE SEPULCHER AND HE SAW AND BELIEVED."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON PUT IT THIS WAY: "HIS RESURRECTION TAKES US OUT OF TIME AND MAKES US FEEL ETERNITY."

FROM THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE, JESUS SHARED THESE WORDS: "WHY SHOULD I BE OUT OF MIND BECAUSE I AM OUT OF SIGHT; I AM WAITING FOR YOU TO JOIN ME, SO WE MAY BEGIN AGAIN THE RESURRECTION JOURNEY." HE IS REMINDING US THAT GOD AND HIS SON ARE NEVER OUT OF MIND TO THE PERSON WHOSE FAITH IS STEADY AND GROWING. I DISCOVERED A SHORT PASSAGE FROM JEREMIAH (31:3), WHICH IS AN ESSENCE OF THE EASTER EVENT: I HAVE LOVED YOU WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE; THEREFORE I CONTINUE MY FAITHFULNESS TO YOU. THIS PASSAGE AND THE ENTIRE

JEREMIAH CHAPTER ARE AMONG THE FINEST AND MOST MEANINGFUL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT; PERHAPS IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

THIS DAY IS A BASIC REASON FOR OUR FAITH. THE TRUE GIFT OF EASTER IS THIS: OUR PAST, OUR PRESENT, OUR FUTURE, HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO US IN THE REDEEMING ACT OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD. TO MAKE THIS A POWERFUL AND EVERLASTING EASTER, THE QUESTION WE MUST ASK IS: HAVE WE BEGUN OR CONTINUED OUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM?

WE ASK AT EASTER AND CONTINUOUSLY, WHAT IS THE STATUS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? FOR OUR GOD NEVER STOPS LOVING US DESPITE OUR FAILINGS. THE DIS-CONNECT COMES ONLY WHEN WE BLOCK GOD OUT...OR BRING HIM INTO OUR LIVES ONLY IF WE NEED SOMETHING. WE ASK A FAVOR, WE PRAY FOR A CURE, WE NEED A SITUATION FIXED. EASTER IS A CELEBRATION BUT ALSO A BUILDING BLOCK FOR OUR FAITH. FROM THE PUBLICATION ENTITLED *THE ABBEY LETTER*, CREATED BY BENEDICTINE MONKS, WE HEAR THE FOLLOWING: "LIFE IS GOD'S FREE GIFT. GOD LOVES US INTO A FAITH BASED EXISTENCE; WE WOULD NOT CONTINUE TO EXIST MEANINGFULLY WITHOUT THE ONGOING AND CONTINUOUS LOVE THAT GOD WANTS TO SHARE WITH US. WE HAVE ALWAYS BEFORE US THE REMINDER OF THE RISEN LORD, WE NEED THIS TO HELP US RECOGNIZE GOD'S LIFE WHEN IT APPEARS IN OUR OWN LIVES. THE LORD'S VOICE CALLS US BY NAME, SO THAT LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE SUDDENLY LOOK UP AND RECOGNIZE THE LORD OF LIFE STANDING IN FRONT OF US."

OUR LIVES ARE PROFOUNDLY CHANGED BY THE RESURRECTED LIFE OF OUR LORD. OUR PRIORITIES ARE DIFFERENT; OUR HEARTS ARE MORE FULL, OUR FAITH HAS

TAKEN US IN NEW DIRECTIONS. OUR FAITH ALSO TELLS US THAT WE ARE TO GO TO OTHERS TO SHARE WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED; OUR FAITH IS EXPRESSED NOT ONLY IN A PARISH, A DENOMINATION, A DIOCESE OR A UNIVERSAL CHURCH. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY IN A WAY OF LIFE; AND BECAUSE IT IS, WE ARE CHANGED AND CHALLENGED TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS AND TO BUILD OUR LIVES AROUND GOD AND HIS SON.

ON A PANEL DISCUSSION I WAS RECENTLY ASKED BY A FRIEND TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS ABOUT CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY MEAN?

- RESURRECTION GUARANTEES THE DEITY OF CHRIST.
- HIS RESURRECTION SOLIDIFIES THAT OUR SINS MAY BE FORGIVEN.
- IT FURNISHES EACH ONE OF US WHO LIVE THE FAITH, A HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

THE APPEARANCE OF OUR RISEN LORD HAS TOUCHED US IN SO MANY WAYS: IN THE MIDST OF AN EASTER CELEBRATION, WE MUST NOT MISS THOSE TOUCHES. AN ANONYMOUS WRITER REMINDS US THAT:

- JESUS' APPEARANCE GAVE US LIGHT BEYOND DARKNESS AND CONTINUES TO DO SO.
- THE RESURRECTION MADE THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TRANSFORMATION. GROUPS OF DISPIRITED AND FRIGHTENED PEOPLE BEGAN TO BE ABLE TO MOVE AHEAD IN THEIR FAITH.
- MANY TODAY ARE STILL INCREDULOUS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION. BUT HEAR THE WORDS OF ISAAC WATTS HYMN:

*WRAPT IS THE SILENCE OF THE TOMB,
THE GREAT REDEEMER LAY,
UNTIL THE REVOLVING SKIES HAD BROUGHT THEE THINE,
THE APPOINTED DAY.
HELL AND GRAVE COMBINED THEIR FORCE TO TRY HOLDING OUR
LORD IN VAIN.
SUDDENLY THE CONQUEROR AROSE AND BURST THEIR FEEBLE
CHAIN.*

PARAPHRASING: I REPEAT THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION FROM A
MARCUS BORG PERCEPTION:

1. CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD.
2. EASTER IS THE DEFEAT OF DEATH.
3. EASTER IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE AFTER-LIFE FOR US.

FROM *BARCLAY'S STUDY BIBLE*:

SO, THEN, IT WAS TO PETER AND JOHN THAT MARY WENT; AND THEY IMMEDIATELY SET OUT FOR THE TOMB. THEY WENT AT A RUN; AND JOHN, WHO MUST HAVE BEEN A YOUNGER MAN THAN PETER SINCE HE LIVED ON UNTIL THE END OF THE CENTURY, OUTSTRIPPED PETER IN THIS BREATHLESS RACE. WHEN THEY CAME TO THE TOMB JOHN LOOKED IN BUT WENT NO FURTHER. PETER WITH TYPICAL IMPULSIVENESS, NOT ONLY LOOKED IN, BUT WENT IN. FOR THE MOMENT, PETER WAS ONLY AMAZED AT THE EMPTY TOMB; BUT THINGS BEGAN TO HAPPEN IN JOHN'S MIND. IF SOMEONE HAD REMOVED JESUS' BODY, IF TOMB-ROBBERS HAD BEEN AT WORK, WHEY SHOULD THEY LEAVE THE GRAVE-CLOTHES?

THEN SOMETHING ELSE STRUCK HIM - THE GRAVE-CLOTHES WERE NOT DISHEVELLED AND DISARRANGED. THEY WERE LYING THERE STILL IN THEIR FOLDS - THAT IS WHAT THE GREEK MEANS - THE CLOTHES FOR THE BODY WHERE THE BODY

HAD BEEN; THE NAPKIN WHERE THE HEAD HAD LAIN. THE WHOLE POINT OF THE DESCRIPTION IS THAT THE GRAVE-CLOTHES DID NOT LOOK AS IF THEY HAD BEEN PUT OFF OR TAKEN OFF; THEY WERE LYING THERE IN THEIR REGULAR FOLDS AS IF THE BODY OF JESUS HAD SIMPLY EVAPORATED OUT OF THEM. THE SIGHT SUDDENLY PENETRATED JOHN'S MIND; HE REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED – AND HE BELIEVED. IT WAS NOT WHAT HE HAD READ IN SCRIPTURE WHICH CONVINCED HIM THAT JESUS HAD RISEN; IT WAS WHAT HE SAW WITH HIS OWN EYES.

THE PART THAT LOVE PLAYS IN THIS STORY IS EXTRAORDINARY. IT WAS MARY WHO LOVED JESUS SO MUCH, WHO WAS FIRST AT THE TOMB. IT WAS JOHN, THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED AND WHO LOVED JESUS, WHO WAS FIRST TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION. THAT MUST ALWAYS BE JOHN'S GREAT GLORY. HE WAS THE FIRST MAN TO UNDERSTAND AND BELIEVE; LOVE OF CHRIST GAVE HIM EYES TO READ THE SIGNS AND A MIND TO UNDERSTAND.

*LIVING CHRIST, YOU ARE RISEN FROM THE DEAD!
LOVE REIGNS!
YOU ARE LIFE STRONGER THAN DEATH;
RAISE OUR EYES TO SEE YOU AND FOLLOW YOU
AS THE NEW DAY DAWNS.*

*GLORIOUS LORD OF LIFE,
WE PRAISE YOU,
THAT BY THE MIGHTY RESURRECTION OF YOUR SON,
YOU HAVE DELIVERED US FROM SIN AND DEATH
AND MADE YOUR WHOLE CREATION NEW;
GRANT THAT WE WHO CELEBRATE WITH JOY
CHRIST'S RISING FROM THE DEAD,
MAY BE RAISED
TO THE LIFE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS;
THROUGH HIM WHO LIVES AND REIGNS
WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,
ONE GOD NOW AND FOREVER.*

FROM PETER MARSHALL'S *THE FIRST EASTER*:

WHAT IS THIS MYSTERIOUS AND JOYOUS INFLUENCE THAT SEEMS TO PERMEATE EVERYTHING AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR...THAT LINGERS TO TOUCH US ALL WITH ITS MAGIC?

IT IS AN INTRIGUING THING...INTANGIBLE, YET REAL.

WE FEEL IT...SENSE IT...THRILL TO IT.

EASTER IS MORE THAN A CELEBRATION. EASTER IS MORE THAN A SPRING FESTIVAL. SO FAR AS THE CHURCH IS CONCERNED, THE MESSAGE OF EASTER IS CONTAINED IN ONE SIMPLE, YET PROFOUND FOUR WORDS :

“CHRIST IS FOREVER RISEN!”