

KNOWING BEFORE WE KNOW

It's Easter, and I would like to talk about your resurrection, and mine. I would like to talk about death, and dying your way into LIFE. Something about Easter makes me want to talk about *everything* - all at once, all at the same time - precisely at the time when we probably need the fewest words, and more time to just let things sweep over us, and into us. But hopefully you will indulge me for a little while, because if I don't get to talk about Easter, I'm just going to shrivel up and die.

(1) WE KNOW MORE THAN WE THINK WE KNOW.

That's my first point, in case you're still waking up. We know more than we think we know. Everybody here knows that life on earth is not the end of our story. It may be a muted note for some; it may not be a very fully developed, conscious conviction for others. But somewhere within, everybody knows it.

It sometimes proves out in strange ways: A hardened criminal with no regard for God or humankind suddenly risks his life to save a child. A self-centered, shallow young person suddenly abandons greed and games to risk life and limb for country. In how many ways, over how many centuries, have we seen humans choose to do what makes no sense at all - except for some inner light that sees a future and a meaning far beyond this realm and time. Of course, sometimes we laugh it off and call it "instinct." Call it anything you like. We know more than we think we know.

Easter is not about eternal life. Easter is about Jesus' authority in an ongoing mission to earth. I say "ongoing" because it did not start with Jesus' birth, and it did not end with His death. Sometimes we Christians need to remember that Jesus did not invent God - He reveals God. God has always been at work for us, but we didn't know it - or we had such a dim comprehension that some days it didn't even overcome our fear and loneliness. And despite all that Jesus did to reveal and reconcile and save, some of us *still* have dim days. Easter is the beginning of the second phase of the mission - Phase II of "The Occupation." A vastly superior BEING from beyond our world - beyond our space and time - is trying to take over life here. It is a war, and we fight hard to keep our sovereignty and independence so that we can go on doing things our own

way. It takes us all a long time and considerable experience before we figure out that this vast and threatening BEING is our Creator - and that he loves us, belongs here, and should never have been ostracized in the first place. In fact, most of us would never even have considered such a thing if it had not been for Jesus.

But we need to know that we can trust Jesus, and can go with Him into this very new WAY of Life, this very new WAY of thinking and being. After all, it's pretty hard to switch everything and start believing that our worst Enemy - the BEING who makes it so hard here - is actually our best and dearest friend. Or, as Jesus put it, "Abba" ... Daddy ... the loving Father. But Jesus keeps reminding us that it is Abba who sent Him, and that He only speaks and acts in Abba's name.

This is what got Jesus killed, of course. To most of the troops on this planet, it looks like a ruse - a mean and dastardly deceit on the part of the Enemy to make the takeover easier, to take us off our guard so The Occupation can proceed with less resistance. In the eyes of most, Jesus is the epitome of the quisling, the traitor, the ultimate Benedict Arnold of the human race. His real mission is to turn us over to the power of the invading BEING - to turn us all into the slaves of God: On your knees. Pray every day. Seek only his will - that is, "Not my will but thine be done." How stupid does He think we are?! That's what most people think. So we killed Him.

But if the Enemy really is the Creator/God who made us and loves us, there is no choice, finally, but to send such a One as Jesus, and to give Him authority and full support. And Jesus will do everything in His power to reach and persuade us - except He will not force us, or physically hurt us. That would undo the purpose itself. So we go on encountering Him after a death that could not stick. Jesus is revealed as the One stronger than sin and death - the One we can trust and follow. Wherever you were before or are now, whomever you are now or were before, whatever you did before - come with Him now. That is the Easter Message.

Maundy Thursday is about His obedience. Good Friday is about how much He cares, and therefore also about how much Abba cares. Easter is recognition of our True King, the ONE with authority even over death. So we can join His Kingdom whenever we are willing. It also means, along the way, that our "knowing about eternal life" can now come out of the shadows or out of the dim corners of our awareness,

and stand out clear and strong in all our perspectives. The Enemy is not our enemy - it is actually Abba, who loves us and wants us with him forever. No loneliness or fear can stand against that. Jesus is not quisling, but Messiah - Savior and Son of God. And we are grateful beyond ways to say, even in small and personal ways. I have a mother and father and friends and loved ones who have passed on, but Jesus has canceled out the concept of "goodbye." We shall meet again. Since I am one of those people who hate saying goodbye, I string with Jesus. It's just a small, personal thing - one of the little perks of the Christian WAY. It certainly is not the core or reason for my faith, but I am grateful nonetheless.

I am chattering on here, about things beyond our knowing. And partly it's to hold us here for a little while longer, so you will have time to feel the dawn, and greet your Risen Lord anew and within. The Risen Christ is here more surely than you or I, and is more aware of you than I am (and I'm more aware of you than you think). The Risen Christ cares more for you and about you than the person standing next to you, which hopefully is saying a very great deal indeed. He is risen! (He is risen indeed!) This is always true, and again and again we discover it ... learn it ... forget or neglect it ... then learn it again. As it dawns on you afresh this morning, claim it, go with it. Don't mind me; I'm just chattering to give your soul a little time to wake up, and stretch, and take flight.

The disciples all knew that Jesus would die and rise again. That is: After looking back, they tell us that they remembered Him telling them ahead of time. *"From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'"* (Matthew 16:21ff)

They knew more than they wanted to know, more than they thought they knew. But even *they* didn't fully face it at first, or truly admit it or acknowledge it. But they knew it. They hid part of it, even from themselves, in a cloud of unknowing, so they could go on living on a more familiar, comfortable level of consciousness. Why do they remind me so much of you? Well, they remind me of me too, but I don't want to talk about that. Why do they remind me so much of you?

We know more than we think we know. And Jesus resurrected - Jesus backed by God's authority, Jesus alive with us and beside us - gives us courage and trust enough to dare to wake up to what we know. The disciples did, eventually, and more and more. None of them lived lives anything at all like what they would have had they not known Jesus. That opens the skies for every one of us, and puts us into LIFE in ways and on levels we would not have dared to touch or dream of touching before. Instead of just playing around at the corners of life, we can string with Jesus. You think it sounds too serious? Not at all. It is far more fun to *live* the TRUTH than to just admire it from afar.

- (2) If we know more than we think we know,
WE ALSO KNOW MORE THAN WE CAN PUT INTO WORDS.

The worst thing about Easter Morning is the words. I love to talk about Jesus, but I hate not having anything better to do it with than mere words. Music helps a lot, but even music is restricted to notes and sounds. It is all so "tame," so mundane. Sending a boy to do a man's job is nothing in comparison to sending mere words to speak of the Risen Christ.

I remind you, from time to time, that the Bible - however much we revere it, study it, and feel exceedingly grateful for it - is so inadequate to its task because it is mere words. It is mere words pointing to a Living WORD: the *Logos* of God. Some people are put off by the fact that the Bible isn't perfect, that it doesn't make everything crystal clear with a power and a precision that convince us all totally in a single instant. Others try to pretend that despite all evidence to the contrary, the Bible is all these things, and is able to do this very thing. And if there is anything you don't get totally clear at first glance, it's because *you* are wrong, ugly, and bad. For shame! "But I'll give you one last chance. I'll explain it to you. And then if you don't get it, it must be because you hate God and are not destined for the Candy Store." What incredible assumptions, especially the assumption that human words on a page can capture and clarify the truth and power of Christ. I have been studying the Bible in study groups for over forty years, and I promise you: the only time it is incontrovertibly clear and true is when some pathetic little dictator is stopping all the fun, shutting down the growth, and refusing to let the Holy Spirit get in on the conversation.

Why did the angel lie? (Matthew 28:7) The angel says to the Marys that Jesus is going on ahead of them to Galilee and they will see Him there, in Galilee. But before they can leave the Jerusalem area, before they can even get to the disciples and deliver the message from the angel, Jesus Himself greets them and gives them essentially the same message over again. Is this to prove to us that angels don't know everything? Maybe this is to inform us that we no longer need angels; Jesus, now that He is resurrected, will take over and deal with us directly. I love the point, though I doubt that Matthew intended it. Nevertheless, Matthew has the disciples seeing Jesus on a mountain in the Galilee region (presumably Mount Tabor, where the Transfiguration took place). Luke thinks all these things happened in and around Jerusalem, and that Jesus never went to Galilee in His resurrected form.

Matthew didn't have a word processor, and probably neither time nor wealth enough to edit what he wrote. Luke didn't have a Bible dictionary to consult, nor did he know what Matthew was writing. I'm just being playful, to remind you that humans make mistakes, have gaps in their knowledge, repeat what other people have told them without checking it out for themselves, and get in a hurry and don't always say everything exactly as they mean to. I have a word processor and I work hard on my sermons, editing and reediting until time runs out and everybody is sitting here waiting for the service to begin. And never in my life have I preached a sermon I didn't wish I could change and improve some, if I'm dumb enough to read it after I preached it. Remember that with comfort when it comes your time to speak. And stop using it as an excuse not to speak, now that it is so clear that you too are a witness. Christendom does not rest on perfect rhetoric; it never has, or none of us would be here. Be comforted, and start carrying your share of the message.

We all know more than we can put into words. So did the early disciples. They did the best they could with what words they could find at the moment. And so must we. Now I want to up the ante, if I may.

Do you remember the ancient creed of Christendom that Jesus was "fully God, and fully man"? Behind these words is a great implication that is sometimes missed. Jesus was not "fully man" as I am a man. Fully man - fully human - is not something I have ever been. I don't know for sure, but I have my suspicions that it may be the same for you. The image is within, but we are still in process. Some days we are mere

shadows of what we have been created to be. Some days we are really sad, depressed, discontent, unhappy ... and we aren't even sure why. But that's why: we are not being who we truly are. Jesus was *fully* human. We see in Him personhood, awareness, healing power, wisdom, compassion, fearlessness ... and a devotion to God that is enough to make one weep for the sheer longing of it.

For instance, He is so tender with the woman who anoints His feet with her tears ... and so scathing with the self-righteous religious pricks who think they're the only ones God loves because they're the only ones who have ever done it right. Oh God, I wish I could be like that! But that woman would have embarrassed me beyond all composure. And the self-righteous often give donations to the church, and are almost always doing a little something for the poor; after all, that's an integral part of the mythos of being better than others. No, I am not fully human - not like Jesus was. It's not something we can just "up and decide to be" one day. It takes a lot of growing into. And even beyond that, it takes a lot of help from God.

But because He was fully human, Jesus could die. The Cross is the final proof of His humanity. And even though we have no time to go into it, we killed Him because the fullness of His humanity made us look so bad by comparison. The old Cain and Abel syndrome, transposed to a higher key. It's always that way with Jesus. We either have to find some way to kill Him - kill His influence in our lives - or declare Him our King and go with Him. We don't always understand how He keeps doing that to us, but it is His vocation and purpose. And the problem with Jesus is that He is so incredibly good at whatever He does. He keeps forcing that choice with all of us. Most folk try not to notice for as long as possible.

Easter - Resurrection - of course is on the "fully God" side of the ledger. Death could not hold Him! That ain't human! God backed Him up - made it clear that our concepts of reality and of the real magnitude of the drama going on here are way, way beyond what we thought. It means that Jesus' authority, from our perspective at least, is unlimited - limited only by the carefulness with which He uses it, and the compassion with which He treats us. He could always, at any time, smash or coerce us into conformity with His mission. Only that isn't the mission or the purpose. His only concern is for our authentic growth and awakening. We must come into our fullness. Jesus has plans for

an eternity that can only be served by true beings coming into true LIFE because we see it, and want it, and choose to go for it.

The fullness of God cannot be stuffed into a finite body of flesh and bone. Jesus couldn't wait to get out of His, if we notice some of the things He said. It's amazing how so many of us want to stay in ours as long as we possibly can, no matter how decrepit and worn out they get. That longing is one of the many hints God built into creation. But despite our confidence in our intelligence, we are pretty slow to pick up on a great many things.

Anyway, Jesus in the flesh is not the fullness of God. But the phrase is still accurate for us because Jesus reveals God more fully than anything we earthlings have ever contemplated before. All our concepts of fear, wrath, judgment, punishment, condemnation - and even our concepts of reward and acceptance - they all still exist. But they have to be reworked in the light of the God revealed in Christ Jesus. Compassion, mercy, grace, forgiveness - and yes, love - are all seen in a different light since Jesus came. And they are seen to be major attributes of God in a way never considered before Jesus came. Even religions that don't accept or honor Jesus have been infiltrated with this new light, after being in competition with Christianity for two thousand years now. And Jesus, not very jealous of earth names or titles, just smiles. A mission is a mission, however it is accomplished. "A rose by any other name ..."

Well, this is getting much too serious for an Easter Sunrise. But Good Friday is the humanity, and Easter is the divinity. And the incredible, unimaginable thing about Easter is that Jesus is inviting us in. "Come on into the divinity with me - the water is fine!" *But, we say, we don't walk on water like you do.* "Hey, have you forgotten everything I ever told and taught and showed you? Trust ME! With my help, you can do what I do. Come on in. Eternal life is for you, too. It's why I came. It's what I'm about. Trust ME!"

- (3) If we know more than we think we know,
we also know more than we can put into words, and
WE KNOW THAT KNOWING IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

I love Easter, and Easter Sunrise, above all other church celebrations. But how glad I am that Christianity is not just about Easter Morning. On that first Easter, the disciples were in for a big surprise. They found out that what they had been told would happen had actually happened.

How totally shocking to discover that this Jesus, whom they trusted and loved beyond all other beings on earth, had actually told them the truth. He had risen and was appearing to them. But one morning wasn't enough. It was followed by an even bigger, quieter, deeper surprise - a living with the Holy Spirit of Jesus that kept on transforming them through all the remaining days and years of their lives. The big deal is not in seeing Him for three minutes; the big deal is being able to live with Him for thirty or forty or sixty more years - and forever after that. That is what is truly exciting. That is what we really care about, and celebrate, on Easter Morning.

How sad it always makes me that so many people only know Christianity on an Easter-Morning basis. What's sadder than a one-night stand with a person who could have and should have been a lifelong mate? I'll tell you: A one-morning stand with Jesus is even sadder. A one-morning connection with the Savior, Leader, and Lord Of All Eternity is possibly the saddest thing we could ever put into human language. But things are what they are. And it ain't over til it's over. I keep getting it. You keep getting it. You never know when somebody else will blink, and that funny look will come over their face, and they'll start to come awake and alive to the message. That is as joyful as the other is sad.

We know that knowing is only the beginning. We know that we do not yet fully live as if we believe that He is risen. Sometimes the fear and loneliness start to reinvade us. But we are getting closer to it, closer all the time. When people get a little crazy and there is no pattern to it, I start to worry. But when people get crazy and you can see and feel the pattern and devotion, and you know they are seeing the Kingdom beyond this world, then you know that the Lord is near.

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WE KNOW THAT KNOWING IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

And I am very glad I get to know all these things with other crazy people like you. He is risen!

PRAYER

Great Lord, have you any notion how strange it feels to us that You should care so much? Have You any notion what gratitude and wonder we feel, when it all begins to break through to our consciousness? You gave us big hearts, but it is surprising they do not burst with such awareness. Thank You, Lord. Thank You for Easter. For the One you sent - One great enough to make it possible - and for Your own love, which designed it, framed it, supported it, fulfilled it.

O Lord our God, grant that we may not merely praise Easter, or salute Easter, or say nice words about Easter. Send the truth deep within us, to change and redeem us, until it comes out again in the very way we eat, and breathe, and work, and make love - in all things whatsoever that we may ever do. In the name of Jesus the Christ, who rose that we might also rise, joyfully we pray the gratitude of our hearts. Amen and Amen.