

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Lenten Season 2009

EASTER MORNING

Lessons from the Sea: “Eternity”

Matthew 28:1-15,
I Corinthians 15:12-14,19-20

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For me the hardest part of the Resurrection story is not that the tomb was empty and no one has been able to provide a foolproof story of what happened to it.

Nor is the hardest part to accept that hush money was paid to the soldiers to spread a false story about the body being stolen by Jesus’ disciples.

Nor is the hardest part for me to believe that there is a God powerful enough to have performed the miracle of extracting Jesus’ body from the earth.

Nor is the hardest part for me to believe that God was able to transform His disheartened followers into courageous proclaimers of the Resurrection, even dying rather than denying it.

We are taught to expect logical, scientific proof before believing or trusting any person or event. Holding onto even a broken faith in God may have inspired an unknown author to express his experience in these words:

“As children bring their broken toys
with tears for us to mend
I brought my broken dreams to God
because He is my friend.

But then, instead of leaving Him
in peace to work alone
I hung around and tried to help
with ways that were my own.

At last I snatched them back and cried,
‘How can you be so slow!’
‘My child,’ God said, ‘What could I do...
you never did let go.’”

(Stories for the Heart, A. Gray, page 229)

To believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is to believe not only that God raised Jesus, but that God will keep His promises Jesus made for us. Jesus promised, “...because I live, you shall live also.” (John 14:19b) Jesus said, “Believe in God, believe also in Me.”

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(John 14:1) Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am there you may be also.” (John 14:3)

Therefore, the hardest part of believing in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ for me was letting go of my human, intellectual criteria requiring logical, empirically or intellectually verifiable proof. Instead I had to accept the Resurrection and that Jesus, the perfect person, who had done no wrong, went through His suffering, pain and death when He was completely innocent. His only reason for doing that was for us—you and me.

Jesus’ only reason for going through life and death on earth was so that through belief in Him, you and I would be able to understand and hopefully would choose to relate to His heavenly Father. The imperfect, finite me with the perfect, infinite God of Love, Grace and Power! The years of my life are so short when compared with even a redwood tree let alone a mountain or the sea. One temporary human being relating “one-on-one” with the Almighty, Everlasting God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe and beyond! What an incredible sign of respect for little us! What humility on God’s part to come to us on our level that we might be raised up to His level! What amazing grace that saves us from ourselves!

Through Jesus God gives us the opportunity of reorganizing our priorities, our loyalties and commitments so that we seek first the Kingdom of God rather than deciding for ourselves what God has in mind for us. God wants us to bring our lives and faith to Him and allow Him to show us how to remake them so our lives become even more of a blessing to ourselves and to others.

Apparently, there is a certain palace in Iran, which is now famous for the exceptionally stunning mosaic in one of its vast rooms. The story is that the architect specified huge sheets of mirrors for the walls. When the shipment arrived from Paris the contractor found to his horror that the mirrors were shattered. The contractor threw them in the trash and brought the sad news to the architect. Amazingly, the architect ordered all the broken pieces collected. Then he had the fragments smashed into tiny pieces and glued to the walls to become a mosaic of silvery, shimmering, mirrored bits of glass.

Unbroken objects of antiquity are seldom found in the great museums of the world. Indeed, some of the most precious pieces of ancient times are only fragments that remain as a hallowed reminder of a glorious past.

Sometimes we must be broken to become beautiful! The Psalmist said, “broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise...” (Psalm 51:17) It is possible for God to turn our scars into stars. It is possible to become even more valuable because of brokenness. Never underestimate God’s power to repair and restore, even to resurrect to greater glory, that which others have rejected. (adapted from “Saving the Broken Pieces.” Robert Schuller in *More Stories for the Heart*, A. Gray, page 220)

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God is able to do whatever we will allow God to do so that we might have life and have it to the fullest both here on earth and in the life to come. Our relationship to God through Christ begins in this life as we choose to believe in and to follow Jesus. Through Christ those pieces of our lives that receive the Master architect's touch are rearranged in ways we never thought as a possibility.

When you stand at the edge of the sea and watch the waves roll in and touch the beach, you will notice that each one is slightly different. Just as God created the sea, he created you and me. A variety of persons come from God's creative hands. Even if you are an identical twin and your outside appearance is the same as your sibling, your personality might be similar to your twin's personality, but it is not exactly the same. In God's image we are moving, living beings who are capable of loving, smiling, thinking, crying and laughing. We are given minds and hands to do good works that will bring others closer to Christ. God has given us the ability to be analytical as well as to dream.

Maybe God will help you not only with a new dream but perhaps to resurrect some broken dream that you have thrown in the trash. Perhaps he will show you how to rearrange that dream into a stunning and useful display of color and inspiration. Turn to Him in prayer, let go, do not be like the child in the poem, relinquish yourself to Him. Give back your life to God, for God gave you life in the first place. Ask God to guide you. Then listen for His plans for you. God will tell you what to do. God's capacity and desire to love you exceed that of any human being. Through that love, he will give you strength to follow His directions.

At the Ecumenical Sunrise Service at the Burton Chace Park in Marina del Rey early on Easter morning in 2002, Rev. John-David Webster from the First Christian Church reminded us that when we go into a mall and look at the map showing where the various stores are located there is always a box or an "X" with the words, "YOU ARE HERE!" We already know that. Sometimes you may feel as if your life is confined to a box. You live here. You work here. You shop here. This is where you live, and this is what you will do for the rest of your life. Sometimes getting outside that self-imposed box is difficult.

By looking at the map we not only know where we are but our destination and route are plainly defined. By following Jesus our pathway and our purpose in life become clear. Jesus said, "Follow me that where I am there you will be also." As Christians, our goal is not to just sit still in a pew and pray, sing, listen, learn and be comfortable. Our goal is to share the joy of God's love with others who do not know God in their lives.

The Easter experience of Resurrection gives us the thrill, the joy the conviction and the direction for our lives. As we follow the life and teachings of Jesus, we discover we are already beginning to live the abundant life God offers to everyone. Even though we might underestimate our abilities, let us not underestimate God's ability. God will guide us in making key decisions and will share His love and joy with us so it overflows in our attitudes each day.

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Easter is a time we set aside past reflections of what God has done and celebrate the future for what God is about to do. God's promise of new life begins now and is filled with the joys of following Christ. It continues into the future until we come into the very Presence of the Everlasting God. "Joy to the world, the Lord is Come!" are not only lyrics from a Christmas hymn but also words by which we declare the end of fear of death, and find life everlasting with the entrance of Jesus Christ into our lives.

This is a "Day of Resurrection, tell it out abroad...From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky...Let all things seen and unseen their notes in gladness blend, for Christ the Lord hath risen, our joy that hath no end."

("The Day of Resurrection," words translated by John Mason Neale, music by Henry T. Smart)

Amen.