

Easter: Resurrection of All Humanity

Matthew 27:50-54, 28:1-10

Easter: April 12, 2020

Text

50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Reflection

"God raised Jesus from the dead." This fundamental affirmation in the New Testament is considered ultimate for Christian faith. This affirmation nourished the faith of the first century Christians and is still empowering our faith today. Easter is the season of reaffirming our Christian faith based on the traditional biblical story of the resurrection of Jesus and all humanity.

After confronting the Temple authorities and the elites of power and wealth in a series of conflicts, Jesus was executed by that imperial power and the dominating social system. Those in power thought that if they executed Jesus their kingdom would continue without further major challenge. So, they killed him.

But the story did not finish with Jesus' execution; it continues. The Easter story testifies that beyond the systems of death and domination there is life and hope. Even though Good Friday is the dominating system's "No" to Jesus and the empire's "No" to Jesus, there is life and hope because Easter is God's "Yes" to Jesus. The Easter story continues to this day in the Christian conviction that *Jesus is Lord*. And the lords of this world, who crucified him, are not!

The Easter story arises out of the ashes of despair; the disciples' and the women's love and hope for the future had died with the crucifixion of Jesus. They had just experienced the reality that

hope is in constant danger and peace has no chance: The rich get richer and dead people stay dead. The disciples had lost hope and faith. It was finished, as it says on the Good Friday bulletin cover.

But there were brave women disciples like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary whose story we read today. I imagine they did not sleep after Jesus was killed; they cried the whole night long. In the faint light of early dawn, they set out towards the tomb on “The Skull.” Even in daylight people did not like to go there. Only scavengers were there, looking for corpses. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary set out on their journey to The Skull; their only thought was to pay their last respects and say Good-bye to Jesus. What courage they had!

At the tomb they heard the voice of an angel: “Do not be afraid. He is not here; for he has been raised.” “Do Not Be Afraid.” The angel knew it was a frightening situation. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary soon realized God had vindicated Jesus. Their fear turned to joy. The tomb and they were filled with joy and hope. They now have faith to speak openly about Jesus: “God raised Jesus from the dead.”

When God raises Jesus, God also raises peoples’ hope, faith and vision from despair and fear. The Greek word *egeiro* (ἐγείρω), commonly translated resurrection, has two meanings: resurrection and insurrection. The two meanings share the same root. Until now I have used the first meaning, resurrection. Today I am using both meanings “rising up” and “uprising.” When we talk about *egeiro* we usually only think about the one meaning, resurrection, but we need to reclaim the other meaning of *egeiro*, “uprising.” When God vindicates Jesus, Jesus is resurrected and at the same time his followers rise up out of fear and hopelessness.

Now I would like to draw your attention to Matthew 27:52-3. This is traditionally known as Holy Saturday’s story in which Jesus descends into Hades (hell) to vindicate the persecuted ones. The story witnesses to a forgotten or lesser known Easter testimony. Jesus is not raised alone (Matthew 28:6-7), but others are raised with him (Matthew 27:52). Here is Matthew’s testimony:

The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many (Matthew 27:52-53).

To reflect this further let us look at a painting from the *Chora Church* in Turkey. This fresco was painted in the early 1300s and it shows clearly that there is another Easter story to tell. In this painting, Jesus arises with all humanity, symbolized by Adam on his left from our view and Eve on his right. Beside Adam and Eve there are John the Baptist and Abel who were the first martyr in the New Testament and Old Testament respectfully.



Figure 1.8

This image is quite different from the traditional western one of Easter in which Christ rises triumphantly and magnificently—but utterly alone. This is a typical understanding of Easter from the West: Christ arises alone. The East, on the other hand, celebrates the “universal resurrection.” Here Christ also rises triumphantly and magnificently—but he takes all of humanity with him.

When Jesus is raised, his followers are also rising up with courage and faith and hope for the new vision of the kin-dom of God. Thus, the followers of Jesus could speak boldly, “*Jesus is risen and Jesus is Lord.*” They deny all other lords. This is an uprising *against* systems of domination and power and *for* the kin-dom of God. This is the liberation of past, present, and future humanity from death in Christ, by Christ, and simultaneously with Christ.

In this time of pandemic, we are fearful and anxious, but the witness of Easter particularly of the “universal resurrection” that we are raised with Christ and that we, like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, are commissioned to go and tell the good news, “Do not be afraid. Have courage to rise up against the power of death, the power that tries to keep us from doing justice and living compassion.”

Today, on this Easter Sunday morning, our hope is kindled anew, our faith is reaffirmed and our Spirit is rising up again. Jesus is risen from the power of death and we are invited to rise up to cultivate hope and make peace in our world. “Do not be afraid!” The risen Christ speaks to us. The risen Christ calls us to the Easter banquet. Come... come, let us share the feast!

* This reflection is inspired by John Dominic Crossan and Sarah Sexton Crossan, *Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision* (HarperOne, 2018).

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