

"A Future Gaze"

Rev. David Gregory

April 17, 2022

Easter



Readings

Luke 24:1-12 from the New Revised Standard Version

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

"The Eyes of Jesus" by John O'Donohue
excerpted from *To Bless the Space Between Us*

I imagine the eyes of Jesus
Were harvest brown,
The light of their gazing
Suffused with the seasons:

The shadow of winter,
The mind of spring,
The blues of summer,
And amber of harvest.

A gaze that is perfect sister
To the kindness that dwells
In his beautiful hands.

The eyes of Jesus gaze on us,
Stirring in the heart's clay
The confidence of seasons
That never lose their way to harvest.

This gaze knows the signature
Of our heartbeat, the first glimmer
From the dawn that dreamed our minds,

The crevices where thoughts grow
Long before the longing in the bone
Sends them toward the mind's eye,

The artistry of the emptiness
That knows to slow the hunger
Of outside things until they weave
Into the twilight side of the heart,

A gaze full of all that is still future.

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Today it is my delight to welcome you into the glow of something wonderful. This is a resurrection morning like no other before it, and like none that will come after. It is this day, this moment, this experience that awakens in us something that no other day can. So let's drink this Easter in and let it quench our thirst. Let's breathe this resurrection day fully and let its flow of oxygen replenish us. Let's dwell here in the place of unbridled joy that is our destiny, our birthright, and our grounded hope for a future that is real and honest, loving and peaceful. Let us enjoy this glow of something wonderful, the gift of this new day. It is a new day. And it is a delight to be savored.

You know by now that the rhythm of the Christian story is always a running undercurrent in my spiritual life. Like the steady hum of a machine, or the incessant ticking of a clock, the seasonal rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost often give me context, like road signs or familiar guideposts, trailhead markings that remind me that I've been here before, and I'll likely come again. As we all know, the Christian trail is only one of many, and there are sometimes these intersections, where all three Abrahamic traditions – the Hebrew, the Christian and the Islamic – join in proximity, each with their own particular language and customs, weaving us into a larger tapestry of spiritual journeys that are never meant to lead us to where we know who is right, but to express timeless things in different ways. They are like different lenses through which we may look at all that is immanent and all that is transcendent, representing thousands of years of humanity's quest to try to explain the unexplainable, to describe the indescribable, to duplicate and systematize something that defies categorization. We call these timeless things by many names: the Divine, the Holy Spirit, the Energy of Life, God, Wisdom, the Universe. But by whatever name, it is the force that breathes us and beats our hearts, that keeps us always on the green growing edge of life and creation. It is a process that is never complete, never over, and never wants to be. With this seemingly never-ending rhythm of seasons, every cycle brings us something new, something beautiful that has never been, and a future that is always ripening with the promise of something new.

For me, this is Easter: the yearly celebration of a life that is forever new, told here in the story of the liminal spaces of grief and loss, the difficult and painful threshold between a birth, a life, a death, to a new birth/life/death, and an always *new* birth/life/death. This is the Bible that we read in all of creation. We've written volumes of theological material to try to explain it, when it really just *exists* all around us. We need simply remove our blindfolds to find it right before us, everywhere, all around us.

The Lengthening Season has provided us a time of reset, a short version, perhaps, of the global human experience of pandemic that has been our major reboot over the last two or three years; a systemic adjustment of all that our faith has taught us, all that the experiences of life have taught us, and all of what is future that we used to think we knew something about. Five years ago, as we began to contemplate this journey of ours together at CCC, if you had told me what we'd be thinking about on Easter Sunday, 2022, I'd have said with the Apostles, "This seems like an idle tale." It was their polite way of saying to the women who had come from the empty tomb, "You're talking nonsense." But they weren't. Peter could not help but run breathlessly to the garden to see if they were right. They were.

The truth is, what may seem to us an "idle tale" might just be, in the words of the late John O'Donohue, "a gaze of all that is still future." Passing through Holy Week, we have once again experienced a shift in the trajectory of the world and its inhabitants. Like those unsuspecting fishermen, shepherds, and peasants who followed Jesus, we often find ourselves nowhere that we expected or intended to be. Through a succession of "birthings," our lives take an unexpected course. The thing we never planned for happens. And here we are, in a new day, a day that is filled with blazing light, highlighting all that seems good and bad and indifferent. These disciples, the women and men who followed the teachings of this remarkable rabbi, thought they knew where they were headed. Instead, they passed through moments of shock, sadness, and grief which birthed them to the unbridled joy of a resurrection morning.

I am told that birth is never comfortable. I can only speak as a witness to the birth of my children, the first of which arrived 41 years ago today. And if you've never been a witness to such a thing, the only thing I can say is, find an episode of "Call the Midwife." It won't take you long to get the idea. Liminal spaces are places of discomfort, of feeling uncertain, distressed, even frightened. We emerge from them, and not to some utopia. Birth is only the beginning. There are diapers, skinned up knees, and college ahead. That's why Easter comes around every year, because it's never done. There's always another. There's another passageway, another challenge, another joy, another blessing to be had. This is our path as well. We can always expect the unexpected. It's called co-creation. As our poet today reminds us:

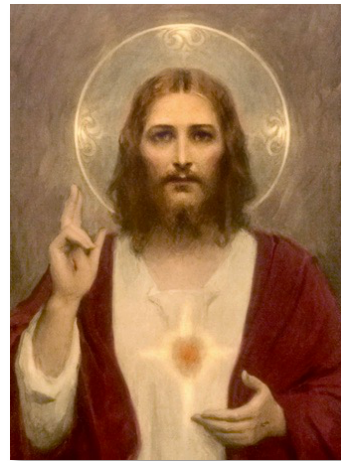
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Sacred Heart of Jesus – detail
Charles Bosseron Chambers