

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee 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.

---

Come with me to the shores of Galilee. Specifically, to a town called Tabgha about a mile from Capernaum, the home of Jesus and Peter, and about five miles from the childhood home of Mary Magdalene. If we wanted to, we could walk through the trees to the southeast, and stand at the water's edge where the Risen Christ met Peter and asked him to feed his sheep.

Instead, let's start at the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish, where Jesus fed the crowd. We'll walk along the footpath toward the water past an olive grove kept by the Benedictines who maintain the church. And just at the corner of the olive grove is a sign written in bright red lettering in both Hebrew and English. It reads: "We are not responsible for any bather's safety."

There is a part of me that really wants to put a replica of that sign right here next to the baptismal font. Because, as we heard at the Vigil last night in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" And, as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "*if for this life only* we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."

Baptism does not make us safe. It's not hell-fire insurance or a VIP pass into heaven. Our baptisms don't immunize against suffering because genuine human lives always involve suffering, in obvious and subtle forms. And every living thing, at some point, dies.

---

What baptism *does* is to grant us a real participation in the Pascal mystery, the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. We don't come out of the water the same bather who went in. No matter who we *were*, our lives are slightly different when we come out of baptismal water.

And because people come to the faith from different backgrounds and worldviews, the resulting life revolution needs care, prayer and intentional guidance as people move through stages of spiritual development. A warning sign might be a start, but is, of course, woefully insufficient.

In the ancient church, there was a process called catechesis, a word that refers to teaching people how to live out their new faith. The practice that flourished between the second and fifth centuries welcomed the questions of the curious, the "inquirers"; strengthened the formation of those adults and children who were already baptized; and prepared Baptismal candidates for initiation into the Body of Christ.

In the early church, unbaptized people were allowed to stay for the first half of the Mass – the part we call the Liturgy of the Word – and then they were dismissed before the Eucharist. For months, sometimes years, people studied and prayed. And then, at the Great Vigil of Pascha, Easter Sunday, they were finally baptized and allowed to take their first communion at the Liturgy of the Table, which they were seeing for the very first time.

All through Lent, we practiced releasing attachments that separate us from God. On Maundy Thursday, we readjusted what we seek when we yearn for Christ and were reminded to share the love that we yearn for with others. And on Good Friday, we opened our awareness to the dark days before the Resurrection.

Now, at the peak of the liturgical year, we gather in this holy place to re-experience Christ with fresh minds and vulnerable hearts as if we, too, were seeing the fullness of the Eucharist for the very first time. We renew our vows on this holiest of Sundays, because this is the morning that Jesus passed over from death into life.

And because our baptisms grant us real participation in the Pascal mystery, we too pass over from death to life. That is the grace at the heart of our faith. By our participation in the Resurrection, we are more than a collection of impermanent, disengaged individuals.

We are Christ's body. We are Christ's body that God has risen.

We, collectively, that is. We, as this congregation, who have tasted and shared God's grace, forgiveness and the love of Christ are united and risen with Christ.

St. Symeon the New Theologian was a Byzantine monk and poet who embodied the mystical tradition. He wrote beautifully about what it means to awaken into the Body of Christ as a living organism created by those who live in love. In one of his *Hymns of Divine Love*, St. Symeon describes the Kosmic embodiment created by God's grace and our response. In these last lines of his Hymn 15, intentionally written in the present tense, Symeon says:

“And let yourself receive the one  
Who is opening to you so deeply.  
For if we genuinely love Him,  
We wake up inside Christ's body  
Where all our body all over,  
Every most hidden part of it,  
Is realized in joy as Him,  
And He makes us utterly real.  
And everything that is hurt, everything  
That seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,  
Maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged  
Is in Him transformed.  
And in Him, recognized as whole, as lovely,  
And radiant in His light,  
We awaken as the beloved  
In every last part of our body.”

The Paschal mystery is a life-changing, life-renewing energy. We never emerge from Holy Week as the same bather who entered. We relinquish our convictions of what is holy and what is not. We come up from the waters with eyes opened to see and minds cleansed to apprehend anew. We wake up to the dawn of something ancient happening *right now* and still yet to come from beyond all time.

And, in the light of that awakening, God makes us utterly real.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them in Luke's Gospel bring burial spices, fully expecting to find a corpse.

Imagine.

These women who had come with Jesus from Galilee have now come to the tomb. Their cause lost. Their companions mostly scattered. Their beloved rabbi dead. The church dead in her infancy. And now, even the corpse is gone. Not even a body to tend, to cherish and enshrine.

They are stunned by what they actually encounter. While they are still confused, two entities in clothing shining like lightning ask them: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

We do well to consider our own answers.

We still look for Christ in what used to be. And there are definitely historical traces worth investigating. Exploring the archeology of the Holy Land. Scientifically analyzing the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo. Cultural anthropology, linguistic studies – all these searches *expand* our understanding.

Even so, the pursuit of historical confirmations will never get at the more compelling truth of the resurrection. Shadows of Jesus may linger in the past, but Christ has been raised into the mystical "Now."

Raised into *this* one precious moment. This one most holy morning.

In the Orthodox liturgy for Pascha, the priest says: "Let us purify our senses, and in the unapproachable light of the Resurrection we shall see Christ shining forth, and we shall clearly hear him saying, 'Rejoice!'"

Luke's Gospel tells us that the impetuous Peter has uncharacteristically done just that. He rises and runs to the tomb, and then leaves amazed at what has happened. He returns to his home, not to Jerusalem, but to Galilee, to Capernaum, to his home and to his life.

Once there, Peter becomes our spiritual guide. God's raising of Jesus Christ from the dead changed Peter and Mary and the women at the tomb. And us – you and me. And the only adequate response to the Paschal mystery is our living faith showing up in the transformation of the lives we lead.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said it this way: "The believer's life is a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus: he or she demonstrates that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement – a

---

pattern, a dance, intelligible as a pattern only when its pivot and heart become manifest. The believer shows Jesus as the center of his or her life.”

That is the stunning glory of this most holy morning. Christ is risen and we are risen with Christ. God has come to indwell in the human hearts of each and every one of us. We are filled with the living breath of God and faith, if we will nurture it with God’s help, grows like a flame until our whole being becomes an offering of gratefulness and praise.

Is that not amazing?

---

Works cited or consulted:

- Collins, Gregory. *Meeting Christ in His Mysteries: A Benedictine Vision of the Spiritual Life*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010.
- Greene, Adam Lewis. *Bibliotheca*. Santa Cruz, CA: Writ Press, 2016.
- Hart, David Bentley. *The New Testament: A Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
- Levine, Amy-Jill, and Ben Witherington. *The Gospel of Luke*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Rohr, Richard. *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*. Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2008.
- Williams, Rowan. *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002.