

“Like Lazarus, but Better”
 Easter Sermon 2017
 Text: Matthew 28; Romans 6:1-14

As sometimes happens, what I hinted at in a previous sermon has grown on me to the point that I am compelled to revisit that theme in the next. Here is what I hinted at last week, that the resurrection of Lazarus was warm-up, or a preparation for that which was yet to come: the resurrection of Jesus. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, of course, is the main point of Easter. We might even say, the entire point because if we miss that we miss it all! Easter is about “living to God by Christ.” (J. Edwards) That phrase, “living to God by Christ,” appeared in a book review¹ shouted out to me! Even now I do not know exactly what to make of it but it occurred to me “living to God by Christ” a personal part of my Christian passion. It feels something like what I’ve been after all along.

With that in mind, I want to proclaim that Easter is **a quickening**. It is a gracious display of glory and power, God’s towering glory and fullness of power! All the attributes of God were joined in it. Love was there . . . and delight . . . and wisdom. Else that pierced heart would never have resumed beating . . . nor would the supply of blood been restored enough to fill the arteries and veins. Justice was there to vindicate His innocence *by which I would sum up Jesus’ purity, holiness—His entire aptness as the sacrificial Lamb of God*. And, when Christ arose, mercy smiled, lighting up His immortal brow as His dead eyes received back their sight and glowed with light, with recognition as the scales of death fell off. Divine righteousness wrapped its robe around Him! And, in the name of the Lord, all this was accomplished . . . **all the glory of God, all in Him and on Him and through Him**. Tis a wonder that He paused at all to fold the napkins, and lay the grave clothes aside, too.

What I want to accomplish this morning is twofold: first, I want to invite you to participate in the forty days of Jesus’ resurrection appearances and instruction, those days prior to His ascension. And, secondly, I want to explore with you six dimensions of Jesus’ exalted person, who He was in His resurrection glory then.

When the Risen Lord walked forth, *quicken*ed, all the poverty of His earthly life, with all its slander, and sorrow and scourging’s, spitting and beating and railing and mockery and fake hailing’s, and even its lies were gravel, dust and pebbles beneath His victorious feet. Triumphant over the rubble of senseless violence, and meaningless murder, the futility of human ambitions . . . all that darkness, all the desperate counsels of despair. . . vanquished with a shout! For sure, such footfalls had never walked on earth before and all traces of dishonor were vanquished. He stepped forward and the stone opened as a door, rolled back by a celestial

¹Kyle Strobel’s review of Douglas Sweeney’s Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

doorman. **His appearance was like lightening, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became as dead men. But to the women he said, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen, as he said.” Now that is what I would call “shock and awe”! However, this angel’s heart stopping splendor pales before the risen glory of God’s death conquering Son!**

There is another reason I believe, unstated, as to why Jesus was not present—not in the tomb where they expected to see his corpse. *Nor was he any longer what they expected to see* if they actually held to such expectations! Certainly this is a case of exceeding expectations! For now, at Easter, He was the risen Lord and would never again be what he was before. His former mortality had been swallowed up in a new one, a changed one. His total loneliness had been exchanged for ***utter loveliness*** . . . something grand, unspeakably wonderful. His was a new, augmented humanity, an exalted existence both His and now our destiny. No one saw Him emerge from the tomb that morning. The angel says, **He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.** (v. 7) **Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly . . . tell the disciples . . .** This is our new baseline. Life as lived in the here and now will never measure up to this, this side of a miracle. So we see that man needs salvation much more than an expedited death. The futility of life that we sometimes experience cannot survive the promise of God, nor can the meaninglessness of life, supposed by some, obliterate the hope that is ours in Christ alive.

Of course, this is where we must start. *Easter is about the Risen One.* He began this new beginning. Oh, we are so much better off with Jesus than we ever were with Lazarus. Lazarus was raised and given back the same old same old. He got back the same life we all share. He would, alas, die a second time . . . hardly an enviable distinction. And, yes, having been dead and now alive again, Lazarus must have inherited a strange life, a life full to interrogatives: What was it like? What did you see? What did you hear? How did it feel? Would you do it again?² It must have grown annoying—but maybe not, heaven being so glorious. Still, perhaps, he didn’t want to talk about it, didn’t feel up to describing it aptly? People would have pestered him, peppered him with questions anyway. Did he ever get exasperated, I wonder, and retort, “This, all this is counterfeit . . . this life is but a burden and living it, a plague. It’s all little things and petty stuff! Foolishness and vanity, vanity and conceit. Of course it’s futile and our strivings are foolishness. If anyone knew first hand that we were fashioned for a better life, or redeemed to occupy a better place . . . to find both, you must be born again!

² How did it feel to be dead? *Really?* How does it feel to be alive again? How would anyone answer that?! He, having died and been resurrected would be entitled to such disparagement because he had seen better, lived higher, breathed heaven’s bright, pure air—something better than oxygen? Of course, he would compare feasting there with feasting here, manna with flat bread. Somehow I think, our very best meals must suffer by comparison to those served in heaven. *Yet even in this regard the resurrection of Jesus surpasses that of Lazarus.*

Haven't you heard? **This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son has life.** You must be born again, born from above, the life that matters is heaven sent . . . repent and believe the gospel. Believe and live." No doubt such words, if not better ones, for sure, must have spilled from Lazarus' restarted lips repeatedly, knowing what he did of the Christ, receiving what he received from Jesus.

For in the glorious resurrection of Jesus we observe all the attributes of God displayed, publicized and published! It follows that in every believer's spiritual quickening, we see another manifestation of the divine presence. We cannot quantify how much there is of God in the regeneration of each born-again soul; but we can affirm that regeneration is, in every case, **a new creation**—God likens it to such! Yes, God establishes an equivalency, in His Word, between this new creation and Jesus' resurrection—which suggests that conversion is an Easter. "To be begotten unto a lively hope is a mass of wonders," says Charles Spurgeon. To move from spiritual death and impotence to spiritual life and *true aliveness* is a full traverse of all that is miraculous. Forget angels, and visions and ecstasies! I'll take this resurrection life over them all. I'll take the life of God imputed to and infused in me by faith in Jesus Christ—in Him my hope is secured.

So let us examine more closely this transformed materiality of our Master, our crucified and risen Lord as encountered in the forty days of post-resurrection ministry. Remember, Easter has moved us past His prior enfleshed existence, what we call His incarnation prior to crucifixion on the cross. He now stands in a glorified body, with all the glory that was His before assuming human nature; in that body we observe our humanity as perfected, or as actualized. *This is new—this is something never experienced before in all of time, in all of history.* This is something that has not been heard, seen, or handled before—although it very soon will be! This manifestation of the glory of God resident in the risen Lord. Ohh, indeed, may we cry, **Behold the Man!** Now we consider the six dimensions of His glorified humanity: intellectual, volitional, emotional, moral, relational and, finally, functionality.

When Jesus rose from the dead, His mind was resurrected but gloriously enhanced, elevated, perfected. He re-engaged intellectually and thoughtfully with His disciples—reasoning with them, making sense of scripture to them in fresh, new clarifying conversations. Knowing him, a quality embedded in such exchanges, included interacting, interfacing with Him and by this *sharing* those who knew Him *personally* became the wiser, became more knowledgeable. And He made them more capable of applying the truth He is alongside the content of His teaching. And, just so, the risen Savior interacts with us, continuously, even here and now, through the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus rose again, his human will, his volitional being kicked back into gear. He made choices, decisions, acted purposefully again. There was nothing deficient in his will, rather *as there never had been!* We are beset with struggles to walk in what we ought, mirroring His moment of surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is here to empower us, to strengthen our weak wills with friendly divine resolve. Indeed we can do all things through Him . . . even things we could not do before.

When Jesus rose again, the full range of human emotions was available to Him—and through Him to us—and was manifested to us. Yes, both human emotions and godly affections (yes, joy, gratitude, praise and worship) flourished in His new condition. They informed our quickened will and minds. He functioned in worship, awe and praise . . . He grasped repentance and commitment as the struggles they are for us *and brought us through!* He felt for us as we battle with self-denial, with dying to self, with cross bearing. Of course, his emotional range far, far exceeds anything we might expect to possess, or go through . . . or experience. Everything from fear and anger to peace and joy was more accessible and more truthful. Therefore we died to the stunted and deformed and rose in Him to what is full, whole and unambiguously human.

When Jesus visited with us, during those forty wonderful days of fellowship which followed his resurrection, his moral capacities were intact. Guilt, shame, self-hatred, condemnation and cursing—everything associated with violations of conscience and bad choices—he was acquainted with moral qualities more proper and true to us as redeemed human beings, in our newness. He registered concern for what we suffer on the moral plane—between our present and our future states, offering forgiveness and healing and grace to mend us. He helps us make all things sound, whole and healthy.

Jesus remained with us forty days as our exalted friend. As we struggled relationally, or as we went through rejection and shaming, blaming and disowning, even if we felt exiled from family and friends, this dimension of Jesus' heart was available to us all. Under His tutelage, our relationships became healthy; we grew in love of one another—we escaped the traps of withering self-absorption, isolation and self-love. He kept pulling us back and re-centering our hearts in God, with himself. He continues that work in us even daily now.

Jesus, in his glorified human being, was fully balanced and functional. Our shared life was active. We did stuff together . . . it was neither too much, nor too little. It was always enough, it was always right. We practiced walking in righteousness and actively serving each other—our deficiencies from anywhere, from family, home and background were compensated for by His love, His presences, His guidance. He promised us that the Holy Spirit would come and continue this sanctifying work in our midst. We would want for nothing if we leaned on him.

So, intellectually, volitionally, feelingly, morally, relationally and functionally, Jesus was fully alive amongst us. Human life, including our suffering is experienced across this whole spectrum of our physicality, our mortal, not yet glorified being! And that is why, we dare not reduce our lives to anything less than this whole. . . to imagine that physical suffering should be the sole criterion for determining the quality of human life.

Those who are sick and dying, those who are suffering intense pain, do not by suffering cease to be human beings—their needs across this whole spectrum must be lovingly assessed, affirmed and addressed, ministered to. As long as the Lord lives in us, no one should suffer alone, narcissism should not go unchallenged, nor depression, mental illness . . . no affliction known to ourselves should be outside the purview of Christ's care through us! Indeed, spiritual ignorance . . . the lack of a saving relationship with the Lord may be both the compelling need if not the central cause of suffering. That is a call to ministry! Let us take away the misery by befriending the sick and the dying. These are the godly responses to the human predicament, and to end of life duress. The pain of isolation we can amend. We can avoid abandonment and oppose exile as inhumane. Caring of others is meaningful. Loving one in extremity is a humanizing opportunity—we should rise to it!!

God discerning the isolation of Adam addressed his need. He did not offer him an exit strategy. No, he offered him a companion. God answered Adam's loneliness with Eve. Somehow, through all the noise of all the centuries, through all the mess of alternatives and substitutes, social engineering and all that, the original prescription retains both usefulness and validity. But God being mercy also sent His Son as a friend to all who would believe in Him. Loneliness was there in the beginning, but since the first intervention, loneliness has not been the plan. The incarnation was. Easter was. God sent His Son to befriend us! Resurrection was the plan. Your salvation and regeneration were. How friendly is our God. Think on these things, friends . . . and consider the goodness of the Lord.

Amen