

A Sermon for Easter Day, April 8, 2007

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One way to understand Easter is through the biblical promise of a new creation. God said, through the prophet Isaiah, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” (Isaiah 65:17-18). And again, in Revelation, God proclaims, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 20:5).

God promised a new creation because there is an essential flaw in the original creation. God created the world in the beginning and declared, “It is good.” But man disobeyed his creator. Sin caused a fatal flaw that keeps us and the world from being all that God intended.

After the fall of man in Genesis, the rest of the Old Testament story has two distinct themes: God’s promise and human failure. God called Abraham and promised that all nations would be blessed in him. From Abraham came Isaac, Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel.

God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt. God gave Israel the Torah and promised that if Israel was faithful, the people would prosper, have many children and live long in the land. However, as the prophets tell us, Israel was unfaithful. The people did not live by Torah. They worshiped idols, did not execute justice and neglected the needy. They did not love God and neighbor as God had commanded. So God removed Israel from the land and sent the nation into exile. The Old Testament ends with human failure and with God promise to send the Messiah.

The story of Israel, like the story of the fall of man, is our story. Our failure is not that we are incapable of doing anything that is good, in human terms. Rather, our failure is that the very best we can do falls short of God’s perfect will. As Romans says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). And then there is the problem of death, which is the end of all human aspirations.

The failure of man and the promise of God meet in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Man failed, so God himself became man in order to fulfill his own promise. The first man sinned. The New Man was faithful. The first man brought death into the world. The New Man conquered death. As the Easter preface says, “who by his death hath destroyed death, and by his rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life.”

All that was lost at the fall of man is restored in the Resurrection of Christ. We, who were exiled from God’s presence on account of sin, are now restored to fellowship with God in Christ. We, who were cut off from the tree of life, may now eat the bread of life and live forever. We who were subject to the law of sin and death, now have the forgiveness of our sins and the promise and hope of resurrection—“Behold, I make all things new!”

We become part of God’s new creation through baptism. The first creation began when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters and God spoke. The new creation begins as the Spirit of God moves over the waters of baptism. God speaks again and his word is received by faith. By our natural birth, we inherit sin and the human pattern of failure and death. Through baptism into Christ, we are born again. We become heirs of God’s promise and of a new pattern of redemption and life.

In Christ, every human failure is turned into God's victory. Consider Good Friday. The sentencing of an innocent man to death, a tragic injustice, became the very means of God's victory over death.

Consider St. Peter. His devastating three-fold denial of Jesus on Good Friday became the very thing Jesus used to renew his call to ministry (cf. John 21).

Consider Mary Magdalene. By tradition a prostitute. By biblical testimony, a person from whom seven demons were cast out. But by grace, she was the first to see the risen Christ. By grace she is *St. Mary Magdalene*—evidence that there is hope for all of us.

Man took the creation that God made good and brought evil into it. God takes the evil that man does and brings his good out of it. God takes our sickness and uses it for our sanctification. God takes our weakness and uses it to make us strong in faith. God takes our sin and uses it as the opportunity to forgive. God uses our tragedy and disappointment to point us beyond this world to the hope of Resurrection and new life in the coming kingdom.

In the Apostles' Creed, we say, "I believe...in the Resurrection of the Body." Our Easter hope is this: We will die and we will be buried, as Christ died and was buried. But just as Christ was raised from the dead, so he will appear again in glory, raise us from the dead and give us new bodies like his resurrection body. As Philippians says,

"We...eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (3:21).

Easter is a time to remember again what God has done for us in Christ. It is a time to remember again his baptismal gift and be renewed in our faith. It is a time to let the light of resurrection transform our pain and sorrow. It is a time to raise our aim beyond the frustrations and failures of this world and be filled with the hope of Resurrection and life in the world to come.

As Revelation says, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."... "Behold, I make all things new" (21:4-5).