

Second Sunday of Easter

STILL CAPTIVE TO THE POWER OF DEATH

John 20:19-31

Second Sunday of Easter analysis by Ed Schroeder

DIAGNOSIS (The Sickness): STILL CAPTIVE TO THE POWER OF DEATH

The Symptoms

STAGE 1 STILL LOCKED UP AFTER EASTER

Even after hearing the news that Christ is risen (20:18), the disciples are still in hiding, still fearing someone, something, that signals death for them. How different are today's disciples even after our own celebration (again) of Easter?

The Deeper Infection

STAGE 2 FEAR-FULL, FAITH-LESS, LIFE-LESS

Fear, predicated to the eleven disciples here, is the opposite of faith. Thomas is more direct about his un-faith: "I will not believe." His problem is not his doubt that Jesus came back from the grave. By his own words he's not "doubting" Thomas, but "unbelieving" Thomas. And what is it that he will not believe? Answer: that which he confesses when he later does come to faith, namely, that a crucified Jesus could be his (or anyone else's) "Lord and God." How serious is such "not believing?" "Not believing," says John, is not "having the Life in his name" (v.31).

Where Such Sickness Winds Up, the God-sized Problem

STAGE 3 STILL LOCKED IN DEATH IN THE GOD-RELATIONSHIP

Without the “Life in Christ’s name” people are “dead” to God. They are left without the three Easter gifts Christ bestows in the text: God’s own Peace, God’s Holy Spirit (as Breath = Life, or as Wind = Power), and God’s Forgiveness of Sins. (At root, these 3 are synonyms.)

NEW PROGNOSIS (The Healing): ROLLING BACK THE POWER OF DEATH

Christ Assumes our God-sized Problem to Heal Us

STAGE 4 LIFE NONETHELESS IN THE MIDST OF DEATH

God’s Number One Son breaks into the realm of death—initially in last weekend’s Good Friday and Easter, and here again as he enters the post-Easter death-space of the locked-up disciples. Upon entering he exchanges his plusses for our minuses. God’s Peace comes through the cross (note the importance of the death marks). Forgiveness of sins, God’s own Spirit for sinners, also come through Christ’s cross.

Healing the Deeper Infection

STAGE 5 BELIEVING = LIVING

Believing = having the Life in his name, trusting his forgiveness, breathing God’s own Spirit, enjoying God’s Shalom.

Living in the Old World With New Symptoms

STAGE 6 LIVING = WITNESSING: OUT OF THE LOCK-UP, SENT TO UNDO DEATH

Sent as the Father sent Jesus, and on the same mission: Out in the world, beyond the locked doors, rolling back the power that death has over others, who are still hiding in fear. Getting sinners forgiven, getting God’s Spirit into them, getting God’s Peace to people who don’t have it.

Herewith a greeting for Easter 1997.

THE EGGTOOTH

by Kathleen O. Reed

In the last hour before birth
The chick inside its shell is
As good
As dead.
Eyes blind, legs limp, wings
Pinned against the wall,
A bone-bag sealed
Inside a tomb.
(As good as dead
Except
For the eggtooth)
When the filling full of egg and time
Flow into one another, not death
But birth begins.
In the back of the fetal neck
A mysterious muscle flexes for the first Time, triggering an
armed assault
Engaging
The embryo's only weapon.
As good as dead
Except
For the eggtooth, mounted at beak's end, Pneumatic birthing
drill-bit
Whirling through rock
Bound for daylight,
Breaking out
From death to life.
In the last hour before dawn
Certain women are
As good as dead.
Barely moving, crushed from inside out

By fear they let gravity
Roll them through the night.
They will place their tombs next to his, Their hardened wombs
of stillborn hope.
They are as good as dead except
For the eggtooth –
Hope's hammer, birth's battering ram,
Spirit-driven drill, done
With three days of driving through Hell
And the dark diamond walls of Death –
This eggtooth, Christ's cross,
Splits Easter open.

Surrexit vere! Ed