

The Resurrection of Our Lord

FIXATED ON DEATH, FINDING LIFE INSTEAD

Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Analysis by Ron Starenko

1But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The 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. 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Looking for the Living among the Dead

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Fixated*

The first Easter begins under the pall of death. One clear sign of this is that all the players in this Easter narrative return

to a living that looks more like death. Pilate secludes himself in his palace for the weekend, haunted by the execution he had ordered. The chief priests resume their duties, trying to justify their act of blasphemy. The soldiers go back to their stations, smarting from their grisly adventure. And the mob disperses to wherever, gloating over their crimes. The disciples go to their hiding places, feeling betrayed. Even the women, attempting to cope with their grief, are stumbling around in a graveyard in helpless love, looking for “the living among the dead” (v. 5). Inevitably, we, too, engage in such behavior, fascinated with news about the dead and dying, pursuing at the same time a life-style of play and pleasure in order to feel alive. Fixated on death, we all have our ways of looking for life where death resides.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Forgetting*

We are deluded fools, helplessly pinning our hopes and desires on what ends up producing death and not life. It has been so from the beginning, in the garden when our first parents desired the fruit they believed would make them alive, but which, in the end, resulted in death (Gen 3:3). In what was more a spiritual than a mental failure, they forgot what God had said, not hanging on to God’s word. The disciples, too, fail to remember (vv. 6-8; 11), consciously or unconsciously putting out of mind Jesus’ predictions of his death and resurrection. How foolish and slow of heart they were-and we are-to believe, dismissing the word of life. How easily we are seduced, how incredibly reluctant we are to acknowledge our death-denying ways, even when the promise of life from God is right in front of us.

Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Found Wanting*

Once we believe the lie of Satan, that we will live and not die if we eat what our hearts desire, we become committed to choosing death, the dead now drawn to death, like a dog to its vomit. Earnest Becker in his book, *The Denial of Death*, exposes

this fixation, describing how the more we run from death the more we run to it. Is that not the nature of the curse, how fleeing from God is always a flight toward death. So, we end up, as prophecy-fulfillers in a sense, running from the very One who can save us, still holding on to the deception of the evil one, looking for life in what is already death, stumbling around in a graveyard.

PROGNOSIS: Found by the One Who Was Dead and Is Alive

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Then the Amazing Happens*

Something totally unexpected happens! The followers of Jesus, in this case, three women and two men, come to the graveyard to deal with their grief, to honor a memory, conceding to the power of death. And they are confronted with an earth-quaking reality for which there is no logical or scientific explanation. They find the tomb empty. The One who was dead, they are told, is alive. These followers, at first perplexed, then terrified (vv. 4-5), then amazed (v. 12; Mark16:8), and finally overjoyed (John 20:20; Matt. 28:8). They are standing in the presence of God, witnessing an event much like the creation in the beginning, now repeated, how God powerfully and graciously, creates out of nothing “on the first day of the week” (v. 1; Gen. 1:1), raising Jesus from the dead, “the first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:20), the first specimen of the new creation. The reign of death is over: “He is not here, but is risen” (v. 5b), shout the angels, announcing good news, the reality of an exchange, a transformation where Jesus takes our death and makes it his, giving us his life which now becomes ours as well. It all happens in a graveyard, death decisively dealt with by God, and life decisively offered by God, that we might believe, not in death, but in the Living One.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *The Community Remembers*

And then, something happens in us, a change in focus, as we get to be gathered into the remembering body of Christ, connected to the Living One. Lest we think that all this is started by us, remembering is an action that begins with God who follows through on what God promises, who remembers, makes good on the promise. Our part in that remembering is to receive what God is offering in Jesus, how we become alive by means of the Word made present among us in the preaching of the gospel, in the baptizing, in the sharing of the Eucharist. As Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24). Our resurrection is already underway. The Holy Eucharist is a here-and-now celebration, embedded in all the Easter narratives, the Living One bringing life to the dying, as he appeared and was "at table with the two disciples (Luke 24:30-31), where they recognized (remembered) him, and when Jesus shared an Easter breakfast with the eleven on the beach (John 21:12-13). Whenever we come to the place of his presence to have and to hold him, in our dying and rising in him, we have what Luther called, "the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation."

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Alive, We Enter the Places of Death*

Not only do we get to be where life is, with Jesus and with one another as a people always being resurrected, we also get to go to the tombs, the places of death in the world, to bring new life to people stumbling about in their graveyards. Jesus is present among us in our personal, social, and political worlds, calling us to put an end to our death-chasing behavior, transforming us from doing what benefits us to what benefits our neighbors, whose hopes and dreams are being crushed one way or

another. We are already on a new path, no longer fixated on death, instead leading others to follow the One who has conquered death and is alive forevermore.