

THE TURNING

Texts on Easter Sunday

March 31, 2013

Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 24: 1-12

If a tree falls in the forest, and no one hears it, does it make a sound? How we loved that question when we were young! Like countless difficulties, it's only puzzling if one assumes that the meaning of the terms of the question is clear. But it's not. Define "sound"—and the puzzle dissolves, for sound will be understood either as a fact of physics or as an experience. Choose your definition and your answer will flow like water from the faucet.

If God's son were raised from the dead, and no one saw it, would the resurrection matter? Would there be salvation? Say what you mean by "would it matter?"—say what you mean by "salvation"—and you will have your answer, for like that sound in the forest, salvation will be understood either as forensic fact or as an experience. Now, Christianity has almost always had teachers working one side of that street or the other, but if we begin with the gospel stories, we are not going to be sent to the facts. Stories are about experiences. Perhaps someone has come out today hoping the preacher will say *See, it's a fact!* and somehow that's to be a help. But Resurrection is not an argument about facts. It is an invitation from the Lord of Light.

The gospel stories line up on the side of seeing salvation as an experience. In order to matter, the Resurrection must make a difference to living women and men, then and now. As the apostle put it, "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." If no one experienced Jesus' resurrection, then it would not have mattered at all. It would have been a *swing and a miss!* But God doesn't miss.

Therefore, people had to see it, to connect. And two thousand years doesn't change that: people still have to see it. Yet Resurrection isn't there for the naked eye. An empty tomb? What does emptiness prove? Emptiness is literally nothing; the empty tomb proves nothing. It merely perplexes the women. Then men in dazzling apparel appear. The women are terrified at first. Then their visitors challenge them. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" You see? The story starts right out with a concern for where these first disciples are looking, how they're seeing. They're looking for Love in all the wrong places, say the angels. He is not here, he is risen. Neither is he "here" for viewing in the church on Easter Day. Nowhere does the Savior lie in state to be gazed upon or grasped. He is not here, he is risen!

Christian teaching veers off the road when it implies that the Resurrection is a fact that could or can be seen without faith. Why, if just any eyes could have seen Resurrection from the right place at the right time, then the identity of the one raised wouldn't have mattered. Jesus' person would not matter. The Crucifixion would not matter. If faith had nothing to do with the experience of resurrection, then resurrection would be a show equally stupendous had it happened to, say, Mrs. Mary McGillicuddy in her mausoleum, and we had the tape and could show all eyes that now the dead walk.

But you see! The Resurrection of Jesus is not a show of power. It is not about overcoming your disbelief in a dubious miracle, the identity of whose subject is irrelevant. Resurrection is about Jesus and his Love. That means that apart from Jesus' Crucifixion, you cannot see Resurrection. And that apart from the Resurrection, you cannot see what Crucifixion means. Crucifixion/Resurrection is a single event. It is not an argument. It is an invitation to trust God, acting decisively for you, and for all, through Jesus. It's about Love. It's an invitation to go looking for Love in the right places.

Therefore, the experience of Resurrection has no interest in the tale of the tape. In fact, as long as the camera is rolling, there will be no Resurrection for the viewers, for by definition, viewers are hanging back, trying to know what is so before they commit themselves, or permit themselves to be drawn in. Viewers are worried that someone will take advantage of them—and God knows, the Church is guilty of having taken advantage of countless souls. Still, would-be viewers of the tape feel they have to have control of the remote. But Resurrection is waiting for those ready to let go of the control. The fact is, Resurrection doesn't record. It only comes on live.

Now, all the gospels say that those who came to the tomb on Easter morning were women. We could treat that element of the story as a mere fact, a reporter's note, but among the gospel writers, Luke does not fly right by this at all. He pauses to say that when the women came to the men with the good news dawning in their hearts, the men think it all an idle tale and they do not believe them. In other words, Luke is saying, the salvation of humankind is at risk. Unless something happens here, the tree is going to fall in the forest and no one will hear. I don't for an instant mean that the women who are starting to see Resurrection are "no one"; exactly the opposite. Like the stories of Mary the Mother, these say that women bear God's truth first. But let's take in what Luke is saying. If *only* women see Resurrection and men don't learn from them and join them, because men know better than women, then God's salvation will go off half-cocked. Salvation is about to be a dud because the dudes don't trust the way the women know things. But the Christian hope only makes sense for humanity

all together. “God created humanity in God’s image; male and female God created them.” (Gen. 1:27) Is salvation going to sink because people who are so sure they know what’s so say Resurrection is an idle tale?

Of course this Resurrection story is not just a feminist manifesto—but almost! The reason it’s not is that we know plenty of women who think they know exactly what’s up and how things work and who’s on base and who’s off base. Acting like a castle of knowledge perfectly defended against all comers is a human error, not just a man’s. But such self-assertion is part of the shadows of the masculine principle. The masculine principle is drawn to power, and knowing stuff is the path to that power. But left to itself, all knowledge and all power, be it great or small, will just die with us and the rest of our toys. It cannot save us. Someone has to break from this disastrous pattern of self-assertion. Someone has to turn and listen to the *anima*, to the soul, to the feminine within. In this story, some man has to let the word be made one, male and female, created in the image of God.

Luke’s story says that it is Peter who turns and listens to the women and gets up and runs to the tomb. Peter! Of course. The one who always knew what was so. He knew he was too great a sinner to be called from his boats into Jesus’ company. He knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God—but, in the same instant, he knew that Jesus was wrong about having to suffer and die. *No, I’ve got great plans for us, Jesus. Hang with me!* For that error, Jesus severely rebuked Peter: *Get behind me, Satan!* At the last supper, Peter was certain that he had the moral stuff to stand with Jesus through trial and tribulation. He knew, he always knew! He was a man. Whether you’re a man or a woman, don’t you know someone like that? (Watch out for that beam in your eye—it might not be made of sun.)

According to Luke, the last time we saw Peter was Friday morning, early. “Man, I do not know what you’re talking about!” he was saying to someone accusing him of being in Jesus’ gang. “At that moment, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” That was the last we saw of Peter, before he now turns and listens to the women and runs to the tomb and comes to amazement for all that has happened.

Feel what this can mean. Peter’s bitter weeping is the *anima* bursting forth in one who always knew what was so, but now sees that he has never known himself aright, but sees now that he has been known fully. Now he begins to let go of the controls, for love is letting go. This is how the future comes. On Maundy Thursday evening, when Jesus had warned Peter that he was not strong, as he thought, but would deny his master three times in

the night—on that evening, Jesus also said to Peter, “When you turn again, strengthen your brothers.” Well, this is that! This is the turning. Indeed, it is the brothers, you see, who need strengthening to learn the turn when fear and self-protection pass into mercy. When, “Behold! A woman protects a man”—in the words of Jeremiah 31:22. When animus gives way to anima. When knowing falls away into a cloud of unknowing. When facts give way to faith. When the remote control is dropped all the arguments for holding back, and you receive the invitation to the feast, and you go, and Christ enters your tomb and you rise, forgiven, free—knowing nothing, just as the apostle Paul put it. Knowing nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The mystery of the Resurrection is not alone that Christ lives, but that we see it, and not once, as if on an old tape, but morning by morning, new mercies I see. The miracle of the Resurrection is that our eyes are open to a future not condemned to be like our past; that we are able to see, by an amazing grace. Indeed, there is no salvation except it is seen. The miracle is that so many have been made ready in the power of God to see what they could not see. This is Resurrection. The poet Goethe put it this way:

Were the eye not of the sun
How could we behold the light?
If God’s eye and ours were not as one,
How could God’s work enchant our sight?

Theory of Color (1818)

Hear it too from some able theologians of our time: “There’s nothing you can know that isn’t known, nothing you can see that isn’t shown, nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be. It’s easy. All you need is love.”

Let’s stop looking for Love in the wrong places. He isn’t here. He is risen.

Rev. Stephen H. Phelps

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*The Riverside Church
in the City of New York*