

NEW DAY DAWNING

David A. Renwick

National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC

EASTER Sunday, April 12, 2020

Luke 24:13-25

Don't know if you've ever heard of the positive Ps and the dismal D's

The positive p's include

Playful, Peaceful, and Paradise
Patience, Promise, and Praise
Priceless, Prayers and Partners
Precious, Pizza and Pizazz

Whereas the dismal d's include

Delay, Decline and Despair,
Difficulty, Disability and Disease,
Discontentment, Disappointment, and Disillusionment
Domination and Doubt;
Danger and Darkness

There is no question that the friends of Jesus walking to a village called Emmaus on the first Easter Sunday *were stuck in the dismal D's*

I mean, they'd banked everything on Jesus, and the market for "Jesus Stock" took a tumble when the final bell rang on Good Friday: descending into a bear market from which they thought there was no recovery.

With Jesus their lives had had meaning and purpose, but without him their lives were lost and in pain.

A.

Part of the pain of course, had to do with the powerlessness and unfairness that they must have felt not only because of the treatment of Jesus by the Romans and Religious authorities, but also because of the power and finality of death itself.

No one likes to think about death, though I suspect that you, like me, have been thinking more about it recently than in a while.

In fact, last week I looked forgot out our Wills and our Living wills (do you have yours), to make sure they were in order (and there are some adjustments to make!). But I hadn't done that in years.

The presence of a new virus powerfully focuses the mind on *the ultimate outcome of every single life*, whether our lives are short or long. And the stories will only increase in the days ahead about those whose suffering was great or swift or unexpected – robbed, stolen, cut short.

From time to time when I'm pensive, I find myself returning to a poem written by an unknown English soldier who died in a POW camp in Singapore in 1942 (found by the late Princeton University chaplain, Ernest Gordon, and recorded in *Through the Valley of the Kwai*)

*What shall I think when I am called to die?
Shall I find too soon that life has ended?
The years too quickly have hastened by
With so little done of all that I'd intended.*

*There were so many things I'd meant to try,
-- So many contests I had hoped to win;
And, lo, the end approaches just as I
was thinking-- of preparing -- to begin.*

I suspect that these friends of Jesus felt as if *life with Jesus* was **a contest** that they had **just begun** and were fully expecting **to win**.

But now cruelty and injustice *and death* had won the day and Jesus was gone, dead. The dismal D's had won; hopes dashed; dreams darkened; future filled with despair. And with his death, both their sense of **purpose, meaning and calling**, as well as their **relationship** with him (their deep friendship) had gone too: disappeared, disabled, dead!

I. Thinking of relationships . . . It's amazing how another person can enter our lives and we think *they are hanging around on the outside, periphery*. As if, when they were gone, well, we think, we wouldn't miss them too much; we'd move on quickly. And maybe that's the case with some who really are "casual" acquaintances.

But, *what many of us* are coming face-to-face with in this enforced time of isolation, is that some acquaintances, family, friends and colleagues are more wrapped up in *and interwoven with our lives* than we realize. Those casual conversations, those smiles and touches, those quirky traits of personality that annoy us – are often more precious than we'd ever thought – perhaps even priceless! And their loss (as C.S. Lewis said, in his book, A Grief Observed, thinking of the loss of his wife, Joy) is **more like an amputation** (the loss of a limb) than the mere removal of *a coat or gloves or shoes*. With the relationship gone, in some relationships, at least -- part of *us* is gone too! And it hurts!

And as Jesus' friends walked to Emmaus, they were surely dealing with this kind of painful and profound **relational loss and grief**.

II. And more than that, they were also dealing with the loss of their PURPOSE and CALLING, which was inescapably wrapped up in this relationship with Jesus their leader.

In some ways, they must have felt like *the more than 10m people* in our nation in recent days and weeks -- who've lost their jobs! – something that affects not only their income (*as if that weren't bad enough*), But their future and their dignity. Leading to questions not only like:

"How will we make ends meet?" and *"What do we do next?"*

But like

"Who am I when I cannot do what I do?" and *"What's my purpose or my calling now?"*

Let me put it like this with regard to Jesus' disciples: one of the things that Jesus had given them, was a place on His team. They weren't merely bystanders, but **Jesus had given them purpose; he had called them to share in his mission with him. By design.**

For example, there was the occasion far from anywhere when a huge crowd of 5000 gathered to listen to Jesus and they became hungry (*as many are hungry today – and will be*). And their expectation was that Jesus would do something -- and he did.

But not *without first* challenging and enlisting, "**CALLING**" his followers: "YOU FEED THEM," he said. "You get the ball rolling! You do what you can – **and I'll do my part!**" And did their part, small as it was. They found a little boy with five loaves and two fish. Presumably they found some baskets among the people by which to distribute the food. **And Jesus did his part!**

But if crucified Jesus, dead in the tomb, could no longer do his part, what part was left for them? . . . with his voice and call now silenced? **Purpose and Calling, as well as Relationship – all taken away by Jesus' death**, leaving them in the dismal "Ds" as they walked to Emmaus, *sad and hopeless*.

UNTIL . . . Jesus, risen from the dead walked up beside them: present, powerful, and peaceful. And began to open their eyes to see Him.

Now, let me be clear: this was *not a mirage or ghost* that these disciples saw, but *one who appeared and ate and drank and spoke*, not only with them, but with countless others, including, the Apostle Paul writes, more than 500 at one time (1 Corinthians 15). And, while they'd heard the story from that morning of the tomb being empty, and angels appearing, the fact was that without seeing an actual body they were still skeptical and sad!

In 1964, Pulitzer prize-winning author, John Updike – much more familiar than I with metaphor and imagery in literature – wrote these words in his poem, "Seven Stanzas At Easter" (in Telephone Poles and Other Poems. London: Andre Deutsch, 1964).

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not paper-maché,
not a stone in a story,
but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow
grinding of time will eclipse for each of us
the wide light of day.

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.

Let us not seek to make it less monstrous,
for our own convenience, our own sense of beauty,
lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are
embarrassed by the miracle,
and crushed by remonstrance

This is no place today to go into all the details of the resurrection, and why I, along with the church in most of history, believe that Jesus rose from the dead not just metaphorically, and not just in the spirit, but in the body.

I refer you to **Tom Wright's book, "Surprised by Hope,"** as the best book to unravel the details . . .

BUT *what I do want to say is that* **nothing explains** (1) the radical change in all the disciples after Jesus death, and (2) their transition from the dismal D's to the Positive P's **better than** that after they had SEEN HIM DEAD they then **SAW HIM ALIVE**.

And Three Realizations Followed: three Gifts from God . . .

With Jesus alive

- 1st They knew immediately that **Death** -- was now **Defeated**
- 2nd They knew that the **Relationship** with Jesus *that had been broken by death* -- could now be **restored** – for ever
- 3rd They knew the Meaning and **Purpose** that came from **his Calling** could **still be pursued**

Let me put it like this:

With "**Death Defeated**" (*not just Jesus' death, but potentially everyone else's, including theirs*), it was now clear that *this life was not all that there was*, and that "broken relationships and loss of meaning and purpose" was not the final outcome. Life could now be seen as a "two act play"; not one act.

- **What was lost in Act 1** could now be restored in Act 2
- **And what seemed senseless in Act 1** could now make sense ∴ of Act 2

Imagine a person going to a theater and always leaving after the first act -- as if that was the end; all there was.

Imagine their confusion at the meaning of the plays, or their sense that so many problems on the stage went unresolved, because the curtain came down . . . at just the wrong moment

But then imagine their embarrassment and disbelief – and then JOY – when their mental *lights* went on! When, for example, they meet a friend at the theater just as they were leaving at the intermission, and the friend asks them "*Are you looking forward to the rest of the play?*"

And they respond, "What d'you mean?"

"*I mean The second act, the second half!*"

But they say: "There is no 2nd half!"

"*Yes there is . . . stay: and see . . .*"

And can you feel the moment, when they stay, and when the curtain goes up, and the play continues . . . and the drama is resolved . . . **and the mind goes back to all the other plays that made no sense -- without Act 2?**

But there *is* an Act 2!!

WITH the resurrection of Jesus, the 1st Christians came to believe that death, injustice, and loss *didn't win the day, and won't win the day*. But instead, (1) in **Act 1** Life could be lived, hand in hand with Jesus, **in a relationship that nothing now could ever break again.** He was alive! Still. Forever. WITH us and FOR us.

And further, right now, in Act 1 life could be lived (2) with a sense of purpose and adventure; that the risen Jesus was still calling people to join him in his mission;

- a calling from the risen Jesus to be his followers and witnesses, salt and light in the earth
- a calling that was greater than all the ups and downs of life, than all the injustices and losses, even than all the dismal D's that life could throw their way

Psychiatrist and Concentration Camp Survivor – Viktor Frankl – speaks like this about the critical nature of purpose/calling, and of significant relationships (the gifts we believe that Christ gives through his resurrection)

Don't aim at success or happiness --the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so

1. as the unintended side-effect of **one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself** (is this not the PURPOSE given to us by the risen Christ?)
2. or as the by-product of **one's surrender to a person other than oneself** (is this not the relationship that can never be broken again with the living Christ?)

Man's Search for Meaning pp. 16-17.

1. **RELATIONSHIP is critical to life** -- surely we now know this in 2020 more than ever? **This is what the Resurrection of Jesus gives to us** (*and to the two friends walking o the road to Emmaus that day*). The relationship with the risen Jesus must be for us the most permanent and primary relationship of all of life.

2. **PURPOSE and CALLING are critical to life** -- a PURPOSE that may be part of, but that goes beyond our daily work; and that comes because we are listening to the right voice – Jesus' voice, risen from the grave. His is the call and purpose of one who (1) lived and (2) died and (3) lives for us for ever **FOR US. This is what Resurrection gives to us** (*and to the two friends walking on the road to Emmaus that day*).

3. **DEATH DEFEATED – to know this is critical to life.** Life is a two-act play, not “one Act.” A play that **ONLY** and **ALWAYS** resolves itself in Part 2 *when we live it with Jesus*, and that even now can be lived with in a relationship and with a purpose that reflect the Positive P's, and that the Dismal D's can never destroy.

A new day Dawned that first Easter Sunday (from the D's to the Ps)

- A new day, a new dawn, for those disciples as they walked with the risen Jesus to Emmaus
- A new day, a new dawn, that God wants *for us* to know too.

© David A. Renwick