

April 11, 2004/Easter Sunday

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Risen Christ/Risen Mind

Acts 10:34-43 *Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality."*

John 20:1-18 *Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him, "Rabbouni!"*

On Palm Sunday I talked about what Kosuke Koyama calls the "crucified mind." It is the mind that is in us and among us as we live in Christ, the crucified Savior. Paul spoke about this when he wrote to the Christians at Philippi: "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus." It is the mind that feels the strange power of God's love coming from the crucified Christ. The crucified mind is the mind that is shaped by the suffering servant Jesus Christ. The crucified mind shapes our lives and our life together in the form of Christ, the form of love that gives its life for others and the world. It is love that is willing to suffer for the sake of others and the world.

The word "mind" had particular meaning for Paul. He understood it as the Hebrew mind understood it, for he was, after all, thoroughly a Jew. "Mind" means much more than the brain and intellectual ability. It means the whole way we think about ourselves, about others, about life. It means the way we look at life, our worldview, you might say. In Hebrew, the words mind, heart, soul, and spirit all blend into one another. "Mind" has to do with the core of who we are and how that center of our being shapes the way we live. So a crucified mind is a life shaped by the crucified Christ.

Today we must talk about the "risen mind." It is the mind that is sensitive to the presence of the risen Christ. It is the mind that is open to the power of God's love that breaks through everything that would contain or extinguish it. The crucified mind and the risen mind are the same mind. They are two sides of the same coin of our lives as people of faith. Dwelling in the crucified mind alone we risk becoming joyless and compulsive, expressing little or nothing of the spirit of the living Christ. We cannot dwell only in the risen mind, ignoring the struggles that following Christ can bring. The risen mind is the crucified mind that sees healing in the midst of suffering, hope in the midst of despair, peace in the midst of conflict and hate, new life where there seems to be only death. As we follow Christ today, we will experience in ourselves and in this community how the crucified mind becomes the risen mind, again and again. For the crucified mind and the risen mind are not permanent states but a process of new life that we go through all the time as we follow Christ. I think this is what Paul meant when he talked about our sharing in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Mary comes to Jesus' burial site with a crucified mind. It is a grieving mind. She has seen how the powers of the world, religious and political, have crushed all that Jesus was and stood for. She has seen the truth God's love embodied in Jesus' life and teachings, the love she felt so deeply, snuffed out. Mary loves Jesus in the deepest, fullest way. The crucified mind is the mind that loves Christ, that desires to embody the love, the truth, the way that are glimpsed in him.

The crucified mind shares the suffering of the crucified Christ. It knows the struggle and the sorrow that come as we live the love and compassion of God in the world. The crucified mind has chosen not to withdraw from the ugliness and messiness of life, but to enter into it for the sake of Christ, for the sake of God's love for the world, and to be an instrument of that love. When we have the crucified mind of Christ, we are people who feel called by God to live for the sake of life, for the sake of the world, for the sake of other people.

This is the mind with which Mary "comes to the garden alone," as the old song says. Seeing the empty tomb, she assumes it has been robbed, desecrated, or that Jesus' body has been moved for other reasons. After Peter and the "other disciple" come and see, and then go away, Mary stays at the tomb crying. She sees two angels in the tomb and they ask her why she is crying. I think what may be happening with Mary is this. You know how you have some deep hurt or loss, and you feel it for days and days. No matter what you do, it is always there in your heart. You may even feel that you're getting on top of it, getting over it. Then one day something else happens to you. It may be trivial. It may be unrelated to the grief you are carrying. But suddenly you break into tears. It's not really this latest thing, but that thing you've been carrying in your heart, that deep sadness that's still there. That may be what happened to Mary. Finding Jesus' body missing was the last straw. It may not have really been about what she assumed was a robbed grave. It was really about losing him, about his awful death, and her feeling of being alone, wondering if life was worth living after all.

Mary is addressed by the person she takes to be the gardener: Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for? If you've taken him away, she says, just tell me where. Mary is still filled with the death of Jesus, the disappointment, the hurt, the collapse of faith. Then, however, Jesus speaks her name: Mary! And immediately she knows him. Immediately her crucified mind becomes a risen mind. She leaves her grief over a dead Jesus and springs inwardly to life as she knows the living, present Christ.

Mary's experience of the living Christ came from her love for Jesus. Her love for Jesus, though crushed by the experience of his death, made her sensitive to the living Christ. And so it is that our love for Jesus, our faithfulness to his call, though it may lead us into experiences of struggle, doubt, and shaken faith, nonetheless makes us sensitive to the risen Christ. The risen, living Christ calls our name. We know once again

that we are loved. We hear once again the confirmation of the path we are on, the way of love that is willing to suffer. As we follow the crucified Christ who leads us in the way of loving service in the world, we will meet along that way the risen Christ. As Christ has gone before us on the way of servanthood and suffering, so he has also gone before us in the way of new life, the way of resurrection.

Peter also experienced the crucified mind and the risen mind. He did so in a real situation of his day, a real experience of what it means to follow Christ. Peter had a dream, a vision. There in Joppa one day he “fell into a trance,” says the story in Acts. The vision was of a giant sheet coming down out of heaven. It was filled with “four-footed animals and reptiles and birds.” To us, that may not mean much. It meant a great deal to Peter. When he is commanded to kill and eat them, Peter objects strongly. Everything in his religion, in scripture and tradition, prohibited such a thing. “I can’t do that, Lord,” he says. “I have never eaten anything that is unclean.” From God comes a strong reprimand: “What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.” What in the world does this mean? Peter puzzles over it for a good long while.

The answer comes clear when Peter is summoned by some men sent by a Roman centurion named Cornelius. While Peter was having his dream, Cornelius was having one, too, over in Caesarea. In his dream, an angel tells him to send for a guy named Peter over in Joppa. Cornelius has enough faith--even for a Gentile!--to take this seriously. So he sends for Peter. Peter ends up going to visit Cornelius, still not sure what this whole business is about. But Peter has enough faith to follow this mysterious prompting.

Now the background of all of this is that for Peter, a devout Jew, to enter the house of a Gentile, especially a Roman soldier, is an unheard of thing. Gentiles were considered no-good, irreligious vermin! And Romans were especially hated because they were the oppressors of Jews. We need to understand that this gut-hatred of Jews for Gentiles and Romans was as intense as any disgust or hatred we might feel today for anyone we consider immoral or otherwise outside what we accept as normal or acceptable.

Well, Peter goes in to see Cornelius. Cornelius tells Peter about his dream. He tells Peter that he is ready to listen to whatever Peter has to say. It is then that Peter speaks the words we heard in our reading for this morning. And his opening statement is one that is filled with amazement and wonder: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God.” Peter might say it this way today: “Now I get it! God doesn’t favor any particular nation. God loves everyone who loves God and tries to do the right thing!” We usually interpret this story as Peter’s bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Cornelius, the Gentile unbeliever. That’s not all wrong. But it’s not all right either. This is a revelation for Peter about the Gospel, too. Peter, bound as he is by all the prejudices and narrowness of his

upbringing and socialization, suddenly has a crucified mind. Everything he formerly held to be so sacred and true is crucified, dies in the face of this new insight into God, this revelation of the real meaning of Christ.

Peter’s crucified mind then has become a risen mind, a mind that has been expanded by the expansive love of God. The deeper meaning of Christ has broken through to Peter. Yes, he tells Cornelius the story of Jesus. But as he is telling this story of the Good News we must see that Peter himself understands it more deeply and with greater understanding than before. The love of God is greater than all boundaries among human beings, all prejudices and fears, even the religious boundaries we set up between who is acceptable to God and who is not. And when we read on through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we see how this revelation to Peter opens the way even further. The little band of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem will now see a great expansion of this very Gospel of God’s love through the work of one Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul as he carries the Gospel to the far corners of the Roman world. Paul, who will write that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in the love of God we know in Christ (Gal. 3:28). In Christ we come to understand the impartiality of God’s love. The proud mind of division and privilege becomes the crucified mind. And the crucified mind becomes the risen mind that knows the impartiality of God’s love.

Having a crucified mind, we share the sufferings of Christ, God’s love for the world.

Having a crucified mind, we are willing to let go of a proud mind that would place anyone beyond the scope of God’s.

Having a crucified mind, we are always open to learning the truest, deepest meanings of the Good News.

Having a risen mind, we remember and keep a sensitivity to the living Christ who has come through all suffering and death.

Having a risen mind, we let the expansive love of God expand our love for the world and for all people. We learn in our own hearts and minds the barrier-breaking impartiality of God.