

My Easter Maxim

Celebrating the Mystery of Easter

Text: Psalm 118: 22-24; Matthew 28: 1-10

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Thirty-nine times to the Easter pulpit has gradually taught me that sometimes saying less in life actually says more!

It's a strange paradox. Especially around overwhelmingly important things, earth-transforming events - fewer words often speak louder and better than any number of compound thoughts or clever phrases we might bring to the conversation.

That maxim comes with me this Resurrection morning because this is just one of those less-is-more occasions. It's not that little has come to pass, mind you! It's just that the news we have to talk of and tell is so immeasurably large.

So in the spirit of less-is-more, I have only a leading story to tell, then some wondering around it to pose, and then a pocketful of mystery for each of us take home - mystery that might well take the rest of our lives just to touch the hem.

The story is of an Easter image. Though I'll clue you upfront – it's not one many would consider religious in any fashion. But the direction to which it points and the truth of which it speaks is vividly spiritual.

I came upon it years ago reading Stephen Covey's [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#).¹ Way ahead of his time, Covey recognized the power of visual imagery. He developed a teaching style he called being picture-driven and insisted on anchoring his ideas to an icon or vision to keep what matters in sight.

The particular story is from the annals of Naval training and is still used anecdotally to make the point to young sailors that some things in life are permanent, enduring, immovable, eternal and do not change with the tides. It goes like this:

Two ships had been assigned to a training squadron on maneuvers in heavy weather. Shortly after dark, the lookout on the bridge reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow."

"Is it steady or moving astern?" the Admiral called out. The lookout replied, "Steady sir," which meant they were on collision course. The Admiral commanded, "Signal back. Collision approaching. Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees." Four words returned, "Received. Cannot change course."

The Admiral asserted, "Send, I am an Admiral, change course 20 degrees." Nine words came back, "Sir, I am a seaman, second class. Cannot change."

The Admiral demanded, "Send, I am a battleship! Change your course!" And once more. "Negative. You may be a battleship. But I am the lighthouse!"

So let's turn that thought and hold it in the light of today. Because there is no more essential time than Easter morning to remind, rekindle, realign, reclaim, reaffirm, recommit again that Jesus is not among the moveable variables or cultures, distractions or options in our lives, but the rock solid ground, the terra firma, on which we live.

No matter how we come to interpret his life, or where we are on our own spectrum of Spirit, or what the persuasion of our theology, or how excellent the logic of our thinking, this is the gravity of Easter day. If I could keep it as simple as that, and if that's all that you hear from me today, I would be well pleased!

Because this day of days is so central to the faith that bears his name. And it shouts out hope and love and joy; justice and presence and power; healing and peace and purpose. Pure as a Resurrection breeze, He is the lighthouse - a metaphor, yes, but only in part. Because Easter is always more.

Paul once tried to explain such things. He was not picture-driven like Stephen Covey. He used words rather than images. And if I might say, he could be quite loquacious (that means wordy!)

"If Christ has not been raised, our faith is in vain! If he has not been raised, then what we hold true is futile! The perishable will take on the imperishable." Huh? Say what? Those are pretty strong words appealing to the minds of some very smart people and yearning people.

But then later, in a few verses, he softens up some. He must have seen in their eyes that this was all just a little bit out of reach – even for the bright and brilliant! So he took another pass at it and said, "Look, I'm trying to tell you a mystery! This is big! We will all be changed! In an instant, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! There is so much more to this than we know! Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus!"

And this, friends, is the inexplicable Jesus mystery we celebrate today. This Bethlehem to Jerusalem life of One who forever changed the face of the earth; this manger to hillside healer and teacher and prophet; this hope at the heart of humanity whose light does not go out; this mystical Resurrection presence and power that is larger and bigger, and so far beyond our limits!

Back to my Easter maxim. Less is more. Simple is better. And I probably have said too much already!

And this I believe as deeply as I go as the immovable, unshakable truth. Jesus, from the manger to the open tomb, from the mystery of Incarnation to that of the of Resurrection, from here to the other side and back: he is the lighthouse on which we can rely – come whatever may in life.

May we find our own affirmation, this day of all days, on which we declare as of old, those six words again: "Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!" Amen.

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¹ Stephen R. Covey. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Fireside Books, 1989, pp. 32-33.