

“Resurrection Reunion”

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind (Isaiah 65:17).*

Some of the most maddening moments of my life have occurred in airports. Aside from the anxiety that always accompanies air travel, things like security checks, flight delays, and lost luggage can make an airport the last place on earth you want to spend time, and yet every day tens of thousands of people crowd into airports and endure countless inconveniences to get where they're going. For many people airports are a necessary part of their routine as they travel for work, but for others, airports are also the site of heartbreaking goodbyes, and heartwarming reunions. When you're involved in one of these emotional exchanges you may not realize how dramatic they are, but when you are an outside observer, witnessing these intensely personal moments is overwhelming.

When Sonya and I were on our sabbatical three years ago, we were travelling in Europe and planned to meet up with our kids in Amsterdam. Schiphol Airport outside of Amsterdam is one of the busiest in the world so we arrived early because we wanted to be sure we could greet them the moment they waked through the gate. Their flight was on time, but we didn't realize how long it would take them to get through customs so as they moved through this process behind closed doors we waited, and we waited, and we waited. And as often happens in places like airports, we began watching the people around us who also were waiting. Parents pacing, children playing, babies crying, and everyone visibly on edge. Then it happened. A trickle of passengers began to emerge from the gate, and suddenly the energy of the crowd lifted, and people began to look expectantly toward the door and, in an instant, faces changed from annoyed impatience to unbridled joy as they saw loved ones walking through the gate, and the reunions that ensued were totally touching. Laughter erupted, tears flowed, and even as an outside observer you couldn't help but be moved by the wave of emotion.

One of the great truths illustrated by this experience is that we are absolutely created for connection. We are made to be together, and when we are separated from the ones we love, life simply isn't the same and we yearn for the day when we will be reunited. Over the last two years, we all got a taste of this basic human longing as the pandemic pulled us away from our people, and while we could still see each other on Zoom or send pictures through our favorite app, the truth is you can't hold a hand or give a hug through a screen.

Physical separation is one of most painful facts of life, and nowhere is this ache more deeply felt than in the separation of death. It's one thing to be separated for a season, but death is different. In fact, Paul highlights death's dreadful and distinct separation in today's reading by characterizing death as an enemy whose attacks are painful and profound, and in today's reading from Luke, we see the excruciating impact of this separation as we follow the women on their trek to the tomb. They had just witnessed the death of Jesus. They watched as His corpse had been rushed off of the cross, and it must have horrified them to know that His battered body had not been properly prepared for burial. So, when the Sabbath ended, and before the morning light began to fill the sky, the women began their walk to the grave. They knew where they were going, and they also knew the irreversible reality of what they were going to find, and in that moment of separation, they had never felt so alone. But when they arrived at the grave, things were not as they expected. The massive stone designed to seal the tomb had been rolled away, and the women were greeted by an angel with words that changed everything: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Luke 24:5-6).

These words of life were beyond imagination! How could this possibly be? They had seen Jesus heal the sick and bring sight to the blind. He fed multitudes, calmed storms, cast out demons, and He had even called Lazarus out of the grave. But Jesus had died and these women had witnessed it! They watched as He took His last breath, they winced as the Roman soldier pierced His side, and they wept as He was lowered from the cross. So how could this be? What could the angel have actually meant? Could Jesus really be alive?

As we see with these women, the news of the Resurrection is always shocking. And yet the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single, most important truth of the Bible! In fact, the reality of the Resurrection validates every word we read in the Bible. It means that His sacrifice on the cross for our sins was accepted! It means that the power of the grave is broken, and our enemy is defeated, and it means that the end of this life is not the end of life! Christ is Risen! *He is Risen indeed!* This shout of acclamation proclaims that Jesus lives...and because He lives, the pains of this pitiful world will one day be over. Jesus lives...and because He lives, your sins are forgiven and your faith has eternal meaning. Jesus lives...and because He has risen and because He lives, you also will rise and you also will live, and the separation from the ones we love is temporary.

Earlier, I told you about the reunions we witnessed at the airport in Amsterdam. It's something we will never forget. And yet as moving as this was, it's nothing compared to the reunion we will experience on the last day. It's difficult to imagine the utter joy we will feel when faith becomes sight, when separation ends forever and death is no more, but that is exactly what Isaiah describes as God's words from our first reading spell out the recreative meaning of the Resurrection. God says, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind...no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days...for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them" (Isaiah 65:17-22).

The last day will be like nothing we've ever experienced, because not only will we relish in a reunion that will never end, but we will also realize reconciliation. You know as well as I do, that not every relationship in life is one that brings joy. We all have people from our past who have caused us pain and for whom we have lost no love. And this is why Jesus matters. Because, as Paul says, "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (II Corinthians 5:19). This means that not only will the separation of death come to end, but so will the sin that caused it. And we will all, with eyes wide open and hearts washed clean, be able to embrace each other in the perfect love for which we were created and by which we were redeemed.

Isaiah also describes this reconciled reality with seemingly impossible images of harmony as he records the Lord's promise that, "The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 65:25). My friends, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ lifts our eyes from a broken world that is passing away, and it points us to eternal things. The separation of sin that seems so suffocating in this life has been completely reversed in Jesus. His death has taken away your sin, His resurrection has given you life, and, as Paul writes, "(the) light and momentary trouble (in this world), is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (II Corinthians 4:17). And in Christ Jesus, the reconciled reunion on resurrection day is a sight that we will all see together. Brothers and Sisters, go with the peace and power of this Easter promise that God makes to you today: "Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia. Amen."

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold