

Notes for Children's Talk and Sermon
for Sunday, 26 March

Children's Talk: He Knows Our Name

Easter is the most important holiday of the year. It is so important because it is all about the Lord and what He has done for us. His love for us is so great that He was even willing to die for us. But that is not all that Easter is about. Easter is also about our relationship with the Lord and our love for Him.

When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb she found that it was empty. This filled her with deep sorrow because her last connection to her Lord, whom she loved so much, was now gone. As she sat there weeping at the tomb, a man came up to meet her. Here is what happened:

¹⁴ Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). (John 20:14-16)

To me the most beautiful part of this story is when Mary recognizes Jesus. She at first thinks He is the gardener. It is only when He says her name, "Mary!" that she realizes it is Jesus. What is beautiful to me is that she recognized the Lord when He said something so personal.

At another point Jesus had said, "he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10:2-3). He knows His sheep. It's as if He knows each one of us by name. Another part of the Word even says that the Lord knows each star by its name. There is so much power in knowing someone's name. Do you think the Lord knows your name? I think He does. But it's not just knowing your name; I think He knows exactly what you feel, and think, and want, and need. He knows you better than anyone else in the world knows you.

Maybe that is why Mary recognized Him when He said her name. It wasn't just that He said "Mary!" It was that He knew her, inside and out, and when that came through in His voice she knew it must be the Lord.

Now the Lord is calling to each of us. He is calling to each of us by name. He has such wonderful things to teach us, if only we are willing to listen. So listen for the voice of the Lord. Listen because He is calling to you personally, and loves you personally, and wants nothing but the best for you. *Amen.*

The Humanness of God

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
26 March 2023

What is Easter about? If someone asked you to explain it simply to them, what would you say? And not just what are the facts of Easter but what is the heart of Easter? Why is it so significant? What impact does it continue to have on our lives now, nearly 2,000 years later? There is not just one answer to these questions. The meaning of Easter is broad and deep. Today we will look at just one of the meanings of Easter, and I hope we can come away from this service with a deeper appreciation for just why Easter is so important.

Before the resurrection on Easter came the crucifixion on Good Friday. That first event was the culmination of Jesus' mission and the purpose for which He came into the world. Early in His ministry He described this mission with a quote from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

At the core of this mission was to bring spiritual healing to people by freeing them from the oppression of hell. And while it may appear that His mission failed when He died, His last words on the Cross were, "It is finished" (John 19:30), as if in dying His mission had come to its successful conclusion.

The teachings of the New Church elaborate on the Lord's mission and confirm that indeed, in dying on the cross the Lord had accomplished what He had set out to accomplish. We read in the work *Secrets of Heaven* that,

The Lord's whole life in the world, from early youth on, consisted of constant trials and constant victories, the last of which occurred on the cross when He prayed for His enemies and so for everyone everywhere in the world...
The Lord's life was love for the whole human race, a love so great and good that it was pure, unalloyed love. He allowed this life of His to be attacked continuously from the dawn of His youth until His final moments in the world. In short, the Lord was attacked by all the hells from early in His youth up to the very end of His life in the world, while He was continually routing, subduing, and vanquishing them. (*Secrets of Heaven* §1690)

We don't hear much of these inner battles that the Lord fought in the Gospels, but the prophecies of the Old Testament make it clear how fierce the battles were. The Lord was fighting against every evil impulse and thought that hell could ever throw against a human being. When He continued to show love and compassion even for those who were crucifying Him, and allowed Himself to die for this cause, He vanquished the last of the hells. There is not and never will be any evil that the Lord did not feel in Himself and reject. It is a comforting thought that when we face our own evils, the Lord Himself has faced that exact same evil. It can give us strength when we think that our challenges are

insurmountable, or that we are the only ones who have ever had these particular challenges. The Lord has been there too, and He was able to triumph.

We could I suppose respond by saying, “yeah, but He’s God... of course He could overcome those evils.” That brings us to the second part of the Lord’s mission, and what I would say Easter is all about. The Lord did not just come to conquer hell. He could have done that any time with the snap of a finger. He came to conquer hell *as a human being*. As a person. As one of us. If Good Friday is all about the Lord conquering hell, then Easter is all about the Lord making His own humanity Divine, so that hell can continue to be conquered in human beings. The message of the resurrection on Easter is that God did not leave humanity behind, but rather the humanity He showed in His life persists even today.

Let’s now turn our attention to just one of the Easter stories so that we can explore what it says about the Lord’s humanity and why it is so important for us. This is the version taken from the Gospel of John.

¹¹ But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³ Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”

¹⁴ Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

Mary’s sadness is because she cannot find her Lord. She does not even know where to begin looking. Whether or not Jesus won His battle on the cross does not change the fact that He has been taken from her, so completely taken that there is not even a body to remember and honour Him by. Let us imagine for a moment that this is where the story had ended: God Himself, with all His power, came into the world as a human being. While there He fought against and overcame all of the evils that humans face. Then, at the end of His life, having conquered hell, His body was killed and He returned to being God almighty, no longer a human being. There are positives to this story. But, like Mary, we would be left wondering where our Lord is? Where have they taken Him? He is no longer with us.

Thankfully that is not where the story ends. Jesus appeared to Mary, and although she at first mistook Him for the gardener she recognized Him when He called her name. Then He said something interesting that might at first not seem significant. He said,

Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.” (John 20:17)

Jesus, in rising from the dead, was then ascending to God, ascending into being God Himself. When He left this world it was not as if He left His humanity behind. Nor did He become an abstract spirit in the way that you or I will. In some sense living after death is not so impressive: everyone does that. The miracle of what the Lord did is that in living after death He took all those things that made Him human with Him. Not the flaws and the errors that we humans have but the essence of humanity. The Lord's humanity was not temporary. He took that with Him even as He ascended to God.

The implications of this are powerful and important. The teachings of the New Church many times make note of the fact that although Jesus may have conquered all the hells in His lifetime, they are able to be kept conquered and to be conquered in us because He made His humanity Divine, ascending with it from the grave. Jesus fought hell in a human way: we see that in His life and His death on the cross. His resurrection reminds us that He still fights hell in a human way, so that we can know He is with us as we face hell. The humanity of God is essential to His being.

So far this talk has been very abstract I think, so I want to share know some very real and present examples that will illustrate what I am talking about. Hell attacks us in many ways. Think of a mother with a thousand things to do, knowing that however much she gets done it will not be enough. Hell will fill her mind with fear, with regret, with a sense that she is a failure, and is incapable of mothering. In this moment she can think of the Lord, first that even He, the God of the universe, was afflicted with these same thoughts and attacked by the same hells. To have these feelings does not mean one is a failure, it means one is human, and even God is human. Secondly she can think of His resurrection, and know that His humanity did not die but continues alive even today. He is real, He is present, He knows her personally and each of her fears and failings. He is not a distant spirit but a relatable person. Thirdly, with these ideas in mind, she can face the lies that hell is throwing her way. She can use the human tools, the very same ones that Jesus used, to carry on; and she can draw on the same Divine power that Jesus, even in His humanity, drew on.

Or think of a young man who no matter how much success he has found feels empty on the inside. Nothing can seem to fill the void, and he looks to drugs and alcohol to forget. Hell will fill his mind with resentment, fear, anger, loneliness and self-loathing. In that moment He can think of the Lord, and that even Jesus Christ felt that loneliness, that void, and the temptation to numb His mind. He then can think of the Lord's resurrection, and in it remember that the Lord overcame these hells not by avoiding His humanity, but by embracing His Divine humanity, a humanity that is available to all of us. When it comes time to face his demons, this man can rest assured that his problems are not insurmountable, and that for all his shortcomings, God has not withdrawn His support.

With these two examples notice that I haven't actually said much that would help the person in question much. In both cases there is probably a lifetime of work ahead. The message of Easter is not so much a practical tool as it is a change in perspective. Often times we want solutions. We want guidance on how to fix our problems. That's one of the things we come looking for when we come to church. I'm afraid that today that is not what you've gotten. At certain points we have to step back and recalibrate. We must ask ourselves if we remember what it is all about. It isn't about getting a tool that you can use to fix some problem. Rather, I hope you can leave today with a better sense of what the Lord accomplished on Easter, and with that sense come into an even closer relationship with our very human Lord and Saviour. This then is the meaning of Easter: In rising from the grave, Jesus showed that God was not just human for a time, but that God's humanity will continue to eternity. In His humanity, we can find a relationship, a personal relationship, that remain with us through thick and thin, and that will connect us with the Divine power that will carry us through. *Amen.*