

The Cosmic Reversal of the Resurrection
based on John 21:15-25, David Jahnke, 4/16/17

Today I am going to talk about the cosmic reversal of resurrection. The most horrible of executions became the most glorious act in all of human history. And this means that the seeming victory of death which our eyes see has been transformed the victory of life which only the eyes of faith see; it means our world was previously trapped in the darkness of sin and death but has now been set free for righteousness after seeing the light of eternal life.

We see God's reversal in Peter's denying Jesus three times at the time of his trial and hanging his head low in guilt after Jesus looked at him; this transformed into his lifting his head up and recognizing the risen Jesus on the shore and jumping out of the fishing boat in order to swim to him and affirming his love for him three times.

Dr. Sharrett has reminded me a couple of times that fishing was Peter's old way of life and now there is something utterly new and exciting before him which he cannot wait to jump into.

That is what resurrection faith does for us. Guilt and fear and uncertainty regarding right and wrong and meaning and purpose are dashed. Because there is eternal life! The good and true and lovely and meaningful; these are real; not just uncertainties or dreams or human constructs. We humans are not just perishable matter-- here today and gone tomorrow like the grass of the field.

So has the eternal light of Jesus appeared and taught you that truth and goodness and love and peace are real and not just fleeting dreams or constructs? Because if you believe in these things, then it is time to jump out of your old way of living and into Kingdom life where every day is a pursuit through your work and your time with family of the invisible Kingdom things make life fulfilling and meaningful and joyful.

Here are some more those Kingdom things and again we see a great reversal in them all! The nations of the world had been broken apart by a tribal and ethnocentric worldview and hatred and wars have been the result. Now the nations have found their healing in the victory a peace-making King in whom there is no Jew or Gentile; no American or Russian; no Christian or Muslim.

Friends, I hope you have eyes to see the Spirit of Jesus leading the peoples of the earth together over millenia, gaining momentum over the last half century and reaching its rightful pinnacle around us today. If you believe the Spirit is doing this, what will you do in your personal relations; what social movements will you join to further the reconciliation of all peoples which already happened on the cross and which is happening here in New Jersey, right now. I am a part of three groups carrying out this important and exciting work. We will have games and a movie night for refugees and their supporters here on April 30th.

Another example of the great reversal-- women who were, at best, second-class citizens, had already been welcomed into the inner circle of Jesus according to Luke. And now the risen Jesus calls them to be the first to go and proclaim his gospel.

So ladies, what important and great truths is Jesus calling you to declare to the world? What courageous acts of love is he demanding of you? What are the talents he is wanting you to share? Because each of you has so much to offer the world.

But it is the men I really want to talk to! Because of another reversal then and the need for one now. The men had an inclination about Jesus so they followed him. And while they were transfixed by Jesus' presence and healings, and they were also perplexed by him and some of his teachings. And around his death they fled in fear and regathered behind locked doors for the purpose of figuring out how to avoid the name of Jesus and thus save themselves from his end. But then Jesus appears to them-- fear and walls and locked doors could not keep him out-- and suddenly the doors are flung open and they not only go back into the world, they go to the authorities at Pentecost for the sake of proclaiming Jesus and saving the world.

So men..., are we going to hide and publicly disassociate from Jesus? Will we worry about saving and investing only in me and mine? Or will we get out and lead our churches and our communities in the salvation of the world? I want you to start getting ready because I think Jesus is working his way into the hearts of nominally Christian men, and big things are ahead. Thank God because I think we could all use more adventure and meaning and purpose.

But now I must qualify some things. Because while the light of eternal life was seen in person by the disciples and Paul and hundreds of others, we see Jesus and His Kingdom, according to Paul, “through a glass dimly lit.” Our vision is clouded. But that is why reading and remembering and proclaiming the gospel is so important. When we do this regularly in worship, small groups and personally, we remember and grow in the great truths which we tend to forget or know little about. And that is when our dim, clouded vision is clarified.

At the last presbytery and session meetings, we did an exercise connected to using declarative rather than simply descriptive language. Descriptive language describes things according to past definitions or trends. But declarative language is not dependent upon current or past circumstances. It boldly states fundamental truths that transcend what happened or is happening and our negative perceptions and feelings about those occurrences. Declarative language is able to shape both the present and the future in a way which is liberated from seemingly negative perception and judgments.

The Declaration of Independence is a great example. What were the colonists’ circumstances? They were British subjects. They were trapped in over-taxation and no representation. Their King and parliament were paying no attention to their cry and told them they had no choice but to submit to the Law. And they had nothing but militias against the most powerful army in the world.

But these were not the most important truth which they instead declared to themselves and the world. “We are a free people with God-given rights to govern ourselves and pursue happiness as led by our varying and shared conceptions of God and justice.”

They could not know if they would win a brutal war but they knew it was worth the fight for the world and for future generations. And even defeat would not change the fundamental truth they were fighting for-- that humanity has been freed by God to take responsibility for ourselves and our society. That is a fundamental truth we must now live into through carrying out our civic duties. We have to do more than vote once every 2 or 4 years. True democracy and civic engagement must return to our nation.

Peter today was all about declaring a truth which flew in the face of recent history. He had just denied Jesus three times in a row at Jesus' greatest time of need. And yet he does not shy away from declaring three times: "I do love you Jesus! You know that I love you! Why are you asking a third time?" The present truth was much more powerful than the mistakes of the past and his love drove Peter into the world-transforming future that God wanted for him.

So what about you? Will you remember and declare time and again that God's love and righteousness are reigning over you and your family? Will you come to trust that He is guiding all the peoples of the world into His future and that they are already reconciled and one in Christ, as Paul declared?

Jesus promised that he would find every lost sheep. So now it is time to treat and tend to people out there accordingly; with the respect and joy and hope and mercy and friendship that comes with being their brothers and sisters. That is how we love Jesus.

And the fact of the matter is you already love him! In every way that you show love, care and concern; in your work that builds up prosperity, knowledge and health, you can stand tall like Peter and declare, "I do love God!"

But Jesus had more in store for Peter. And at this point, Peter regresses and points to John and asks, "Well what about him?" Jesus says, "That's between me and him. You take charge of your own calling. Follow me!"

So friends, today is the day of salvation. Do not worry about what others are or are not doing. Open up your hearts today and quiet yourselves every day and receive the Spirit of the risen Lord; the Spirit of peace that passes understanding; the Spirit of unconditional love; the Spirit of amazing grace and hope that springs eternal. And become a part of Jesus' caring for and reconciling all peoples. Become a part of humanity's victory...which has been already won by the lamb who is with all his lambs, who was slain, who rose and who now reigns in glory and power, now and forevermore.

