

New Twist on Everything

Luke 24:13-35

“Resurrection makes it different.”

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A Need to Know

The sanctuary was pretty full. Lilies filled the chancel in the sanctuary and the front of the Arise worship place with beauty and fragrance. The songs lifted hearts; people sang them out. Downstairs the guitars strummed and upstairs the organ shook the walls with the life of Easter.

The people came. You came – many of you – if you weren't laid up somewhere or worshiping in another place. All of them – all of us came either just because it's what you do when it's Easter and there's a new bonnet to be worn; or because it's the high holy day of the year when if you're a Christian at all you want to do what Christians do at least that week.

Or perhaps you came because on Easter Sunday, above all other Sundays, you know what you're going to hear. It will be what you need to hear:

Scripture and lyrics and sermon and even greetings in the seats that all say: “He is risen! He is risen, indeed.”

A Word of hope.

Perhaps right about now you need some hope. I do. I need to know that God is love and victorious, that what Jesus said about God is true, that he died for me so the things I've really botched up are forgiven and I'm free from them. I need to know that he's in the world today – and in my life. I need to know that Easter is true and that it makes a difference today: that it addresses unemployment and people recovering from earthquakes or their flights being grounded because of volcanic ash. I need to know that, through the mess we are experiencing in a country that should be sharing wealth and opportunity but instead seem to be more at each other's throats over health care

and taxes, the truth that Jesus is risen will get us on the other side of conflict to love and get along and make a better country and a better world. I need to know that it's not just something they say in church, but that it's something that makes a difference to me and to the world.

And so do you.

Paradigm Shift

There's a story written by Spencer Johnson about two little people and two mice living in a maze looking for cheese. On finding an abundance of good cheese in one chamber of their maze they settle down thinking it won't ever run out. When it does, the simple-minded mice hurry to uncharted territory in search of a new supply while the reflective little people have a hard time accepting change. They keep returning to the same old place, complaining that life isn't fair, expecting the world to go back to normal.

As it turns out, a little person who is able to laugh at himself is finally able to adapt and venture into the unknown in search of the cheese, while the other little person stays in his rut, refusing to change at all.¹

Change is tough to handle. You can get used to the way things have been so anything different can make you want to cry, "Unfair!"

Now here's two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their world has been rocked. One day they're following Jesus with the notion that God loves them. Then the next day the earth shakes when Jesus is arrested, and these two, along with about everyone else scatter as he's put to death. The earth shifts. Nothing looks the same; and it *is* unfair. The beaten disciples find their way back to one another, shaken and defeated and filled with fear.

But change doesn't stop there. Even as they try to even comprehend life without Jesus, the women rush in with a new story to tell: an empty tomb and heavenly beings announcing Jesus is not there.

There is reason to kick at the dirt on a day like this. The cheese hasn't just been moved on them. It has been taken entirely away. So on they go, walking their seven

miles, muttering with faces smeared with dust and tears when they discover they are not walking alone. There's a stranger walking with them, and they tell him everything that's happened ...and he can see how they're stuck.

Stuck like you get when the career path doesn't go right or you lose someone you love or you get downright sick. It feels like you've taken a kick in the stomach and there's only one question that comes to mind: "Why me? "Don't you know, God, what we are going through? Don't you understand? Don't you care?" These are the things we are apt to ask before we consider the biggest and most perplexing and unanswerable one of all: "Why?" "Why are you doing this to me?"

That's "stuck." And that's where Cleopas and the other disciple were when they talked to the stranger along the way.

I have say, I don't care for the popular saying we often use in times like that: "The Lord won't ever give you any more than you can handle." First of all, it isn't biblical. It might have come from statements made in the books of First Corinthians and James that say God won't let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist, but there's nothing that says that you won't be confronted with something you can't handle on your own. It's not what Jesus ever said, nor Job, nor David, nor Paul, nor James. In fact, the Bible suggests that there *are* things we can't handle, at least not on our own. So, I don't like it; and I don't like the way the saying can be an awful requirement of heroism on the backs of people who are suffering.

I know, you might like the idea that you can handle anything when you see yourself as heroic and strong and fierce enough to overcome any odds single-handedly. On a good day it's a good ego-boost. Yet, faced with an illness or an overwhelming grief, being saddled with an obligation of beating it single-handedly would really be unfair!

So, the stranger walks with Cleopas and his friend and hears how they are stuck and then he moves the cheese. "O how foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have declared!" he says. Then he tells them what's happened *had* to happen in order for God's glory to come. And he opens the Hebrew scriptures and explains it all with a new twist.

In fact, he puts a new twist on everything. It was not that the scriptures had explained Jesus all along and everybody had been just too stupid to get it. Instead, it was Jesus' life that came to put a new and holy spin on the scriptures. It was Jesus who explained everything. A new twist, if you will. The cheese moved.

Sometimes in life that *are* things that are bigger than us; it's just that they aren't bigger than God. While there are things *we* can't handle, we will never be confronted with something *God* can't handle for us and in us. Once we move ourselves off center and let the world revolve around God, we've gone to the new place where the cheese can be found.

So, in days of strength we really aren't as strong as we imagine; but in our days of weakness we are perhaps never as weak as we think. That's what Paul the Apostle meant when he wrote how something was getting to him and he kept asking God to get rid of it. Then God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Paul figured out, "Whenever I am weak, then I am strong."²

See? Easter, the Risen Christ, Jesus live in the world and in your life: put a new twist on everything: the Bible; God; life; our selves.

The Risen Christ has moved the cheese.

New Cheese

I had a close friend several years ago, a member of a church I served at the time. She had cancer and fought it heroically for years. With the help of her husband's research and connections, she became a part of the newest research programs. She valiantly entered into conventional medical and some unconventional approaches, searching for a cure. She also worked on her spiritual formation and did everything she could to cope and overcome. We talked with each other, how she always kept a positive attitude and laughed and fought her courageous fight. We admired her for her faith and her perseverance and deep down many needed her to overcome. She became a hero among us in the church and the wider community.

I do not at all mean to suggest that one does not seek a cure for disease or struggle against it with all they've got. But, one day she came to my office, worried; and she said

to me, “I’m getting tired. But all these people are counting on me. What if I die? Will that mean I failed? Will that mean I didn’t have enough faith and that I failed God?”

No. She needed permission to be weak and she needed the luxury to let go. The days carried her to further physical weakness while we could tell that her spirit was growing all-the-more-strong. Christ was in her in a powerful way. When she died, we all could see the victory: not of Debbie by herself...but of Debbie with Christ in her.

So the stranger walks with two sad men and stops with them to stay over. Now he plays host: he takes the bread and breaks it. That’s when, wide-eyed, they realize who they are with: not just a stranger, but Jesus all Resurrected from the dead and alive with them, moving the cheese. And though he disappears at once, they look at each other and take note of their burning hearts.

And they agree that the change after all can be good and that life will never – oh the joy of it – never be the same.

¹ Johnson, Spencer, M.D., *Who Moved My Cheese?* New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons. 1998.

² II Corinthians 12:7-10.