

Daily Meditation 04/17/2022

Easter 2022: Insights from Aquinas, Paul, and Eckhart

Good morning.

A blessed Easter to you all.

A few months ago, I did a workshop with Bruce Chilton, a very renowned New Testament scholar today. And he came out this past year with a new book on the resurrection. He calls it *Resurrection Logic: How Jesus's First Followers Believed God Raised Him from the Dead*.

And it's a very fine book, and scholarly and readable at the same time, as all of Bruce Chilton's are. But in it, he makes this critique, and that is that for too long we've defined the resurrection as the empty tomb.

And I would add, of course, this is very attractive to artists. I mean it's a real invite and challenge to paint versions of an empty tomb. Obviously, we're dealing with a profound archetype when we're dealing with resurrection and the good news that humans need not fear death, so we can get on with living! And living justly and appropriately. And as Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart tell us in today's meditation, living virtuously. Indeed, Aquinas says that "There are many miracles of life, but the greatest miracle of all is a virtuous life."

But what we're talking about in today's meditation, I think, really responds to what Bruce Chilton is saying. And he also points out that Paul was the first Christian to write about resurrection. And he never mentions the tomb. He never mentions the empty tomb.

And he really is talking from his own experience. He was literally thrown off his horse and went blind for a short time. He had the profound transformation, this change of consciousness.

And that, for Chilton, is the deepest meaning of resurrection. And, indeed, that Paul interviewed many people who experienced the risen Christ, such as Peter, John and the disciples, but also, as he says, 500 other people that had an experience of the risen Christ.

So the question isn't so much what have you seen, as how has it affected you? How has your life changed? How have you been transformed by the experience? That's clearly what Paul is saying in today's meditation and Eckhart and Aquinas.

As Paul says, "You're living a new life now. You're raised with Christ." And as Eckhart says, what's really being said to Mary Magdalene is: "I have not yet truly risen in you." So the idea is that we rise in

Christ. And Paul says, "I don't live; the Christ lives in me." So that is a profound shift from ego to a fuller way of being.

And of course, Thomas Aquinas, whom I cite, has this amazing statement about how there is a double resurrection. A double resurrection. And the first is waking up in this lifetime.

So he says, and I quote Aquinas on page 168, in my *Tao of Thomas Aquinas* book:

"There's a double resurrection, one of the body when the soul rejoins the body, the other spiritual when the soul reunites to God. Christ's bodily resurrection produces both in us."

Both in us.

"For he himself never rose again, spiritually, for He had never been separated from God."

So this resurrection in us is a reunion with the Divine. And it's a soul thing. And it's (again Aquinas invokes Paul) from Isaiah 61:

"Arise, be enlightened, oh Jerusalem, for thy Light has come. The glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Rise from the neglect of good works, you who sleep. How long will you sleep, oh sluggard?"

From the book of Proverbs. Then the Psalm: "Shall he that sleeps rise again no more?"

So notice that Aquinas finds resurrection is waking up from sleep. From a deep sleep, And this really brings it home, doesn't it? It's what Bruce Chilton is talking about. This is a kind of awakening conversion experience/transformation that Paul had. But it's for *all* of us.

And one thing we do know is that those disciples of Jesus who say they experienced Him after His crucifixion did receive a big influx of courage and excitement and joy and peace. They write about it: "the peace that the world cannot give."

All these fruits of the Spirit, as we call them, happened to them when the doors or the room they were in were shut and the risen Christ came through. Also, when the Holy Spirit came through at the Pentecost occasion.

So, all this is to emphasize how in many ways Easter is about us, that we are invited to resurrect, as Jesus resurrected, and to get over our fear of death, and to live fully. Whereas the Christ in John's Gospel said, "I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance."

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.