

Just a Little More Light

John 20

James Mays

On Easter, the temptation is to say too much or too little, for Easter can be an embarrassment. If St. Paul had come to Greece saying the Galilean who had died recently had opened up a dialogue about eternal truths, they could have had a good debate. But Paul said this Galilean had risen from the dead—and some of them laughed in their togas.

If St. Peter had said—as he did say on occasion—“Look how closely his teachings are to those of your own Rabbis”—they could have put up a monument to him. But Peter went on to say, “This Jesus whom you crucified, God hath raised up”—and few among them even believed in immortality.

To many of the Romans, the whole thing sounded like a conspiracy.

So this morning I want to say ‘too much’ and ‘too little.’ First, I want to say what any of you are welcome to feel is ‘too much.’ For myself, Jesus Christ is alive and well. I don’t base that on any proof. I don’t believe it because I should or even because the Bible tells about it. I just happen to believe the witnesses in the Bible got it right.

I believe Christ is alive and well because I have never been able to get him out of my life. Christ has opened doors to me which in all my dreams I could not have opened; in moments of personal tragedy, when I could say nothing, someone unseen and unheard but present, led me through. And on some days, I can believe in Resurrection only because some of you whom I trust believe it for me.

Somehow, most people know there is more to life than death. This is why we create gods when we have no god. As Wordsworth said,

... Great God! I’d rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn.

Now I want to say ‘too little.’ ‘Too little’ in the sense it only may appeal to your mind. So don’t take it as proofs, only as intimations, possibilities, pointers which may bring doubt upon our doubts.

One thing which makes me believe there is more to life than death is that so many who say they do not believe in immortality live as though they do. The Hebrews in olden times seem to have had little hope for such a thing—and yet no race has been more committed to suffering, to courage and willingness to sacrifice. There are modern people who claim little belief but demonstrate sympathy and sacrifice. I have often said to my agnostic friends, “Your lives deny what you say you don’t believe.” As the atheist Camus said, “I will live so that when the universe destroys me, it will have to admit it has made a mistake.”

Another intimation of immortality is that we seem to have been brought out of nothing once already, and who is to say it won’t happen twice? Pasternak asked us, “Where were you the day before you

were born? You worry about the end of life—doesn't its beginning give you some hope?" St. Paul talks about moving from eternity to eternity. Once we did not exist; at birth we were brought forth.

Possibly the thing which convinces me the most about the Rising—other than my own journey—is the change evidenced in the scriptural accounts of the lives of the disciples who were changed people: Peter and John and Andrew and James—all went on to die for the Faith. St. Paul could have had a great following had he talked theory and philosophy, but they took offense at his talk about Resurrection.

Then I am impressed by the activities of Jesus' enemies after the crucifixion. If you think the Christians were embarrassed because they couldn't prove the Rising, think of the frustration of those who couldn't prove it didn't happen. They went from claiming the body was stolen, moved from the garden to keep folks from trampling the lettuce, or the vinegar was a barbiturate, he switched places with Barabbas, or that his brother looked like him and was mistaken for him. And on and on.

What then am I asking us to believe? Nothing. I am not asking you to believe in the Rising. I am inviting you—as did the disciples—to follow the way the disciples took. Only Jesus' friends saw him after the resurrection, and only his followers can know he is risen. The Old Testament people knew that only in obeying could they believe and understand. We will do and then we shall believe. As Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

I invite us all to give this next year to Jesus. Go to worship; love your neighbor; one day at a time. Don't struggle to believe. As Robert McAfee Brown always said, "We can emerge from the struggle for faith only by relying on faith for the struggle." As W.H. Auden said, "Choose what is difficult all one's days as if it were easy; that is faith."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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