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Easter Sunday SERMON

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In the first century, John Chrysostom wrote a sermon. Part of it went like this:

*Hell took a body, and face to face met God! It took earth, and encountered Heaven!  
It took what it saw, but crumbled before what it had not seen!  
"O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?"  
Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!  
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!  
Christ is risen, and the Angels rejoice!  
Christ is risen, and Life reigns!  
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tombs!  
For Christ being raised from the dead, has become the first-fruits of them that slept.  
To Him be glory and dominion through all the ages of ages!*

*John Chrysostom 347-407, The Easter Homily*

This sermon reminds me of the first time I was at Church Divinity School of the Pacific where I went to seminary. I was visiting for three days which included a community Eucharist with the most enthusiastic singing I ever heard inside a church. Maybe with the exception of All Saints. As we all stood for the Gospel an Easter Troparion was sung, almost shouted, as everyone stamped the wooden floor with their feet. It sounded like the drum of the universe. It sounded like wild joy. It sounded like I was surrounded by people who KNEW that Christ died to defeat death and rose again in glory - for all of us. It was the sound of deep joy.

The words were simple: *Christ has risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs restoring life, restoring life!* It was a riveting experience. I was so glad to be there!

Yet I think it was nothing compared to what the disciples felt when they encountered their master, risen from the dead. Uncontrovertibly alive. He who they all knew had been dead. But what did they understand? Did they get it that Christ has defeated death for them too? And do we get it that Christ has defeated death for us as well? Maybe? Sometimes? But you know the one for whom it was the greatest shock was surely death. Can't you picture it? *Hell took a body, and face to face met God! It took earth, and encountered Heaven! It took what it saw, but crumbled before what it had not seen!* Eye-popping. Heart-stopping. (If death actually has a heart which is probably debateable). World-changing. Potentially, you might be thinking, potentially world-changing. Because haven't there been times for all of us when we've looked around and wondered - was the world really changed by the death of Christ? Did it make any difference? Is there less cruelty because Christ died for us? Is there less suffering, less tormenting of the innocent and the vulnerable? Actually, the answer is yes. Yes the world is more beautiful and more lovely because what God has given us is

hope. Possibility. A pathway to restorative justice and transformative love. The potential to SEE our own loveliness, as God sees us. Always.

Which brings us to those words “Christ died for our sins.” Richard Rohr writes of what we, the church, have done previously *“We worshipped Jesus instead of following him on his same path. We made Jesus into a mere religion instead of a journey towards union with God and everything else. This shift made us into a religion of “belonging and believing” instead of a religion of transformation.”*

So now... I invite you here this morning, invite you by the reality of Easter to claim a religion of transformation. Jesus did not die for our sins.

Nowhere in the bible does He say He will do that. Jesus died for us, for our eyes to be cleared of whatever prevents us from seeing how lovely and loveable we are, and everyone is. Christ died for us, for our hearts to be eased, for the truth to become so absolutely obvious to us that none of the mistakes that haunt us, none of the unkind or unfair or mingy, mean-hearted, stinking things we might ever have done or thought of doing are worth even a moment of judgement in God’s eyes. We can lay it down. Lay it all down. Walk into the light of God’s love which sees only the essence of you and says “Ahh, it is good. She is good. He is good. You are good.”

What Jesus came to tell us is this: In the eyes of God you are already healed, already whole. In the eyes of God you are transformed. I suspect what causes God more grief than anything else is how we seem to be incapable of believing this. Incapable of knowing with our own deepest down selves that we are already incandescent with light and beauty and love. The trouble is our inability to see that in ourselves and in each other. The trouble is our refusal to hope, to trust, to believe in and lean into our Creator.

Remember that beautiful hymn, My song is love unknown... It’s a sad tune you know, a sad hymn for holy Week, not for Easter. BUT... listen to the words: *“My song is love unknown, my Saviour’s love to me, love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.”* That they might lovely be. That they, all of them, all of us, might finally see the incredible beauty, the exquisite loveliness of each and every one of us. Isn’t this worth rejoicing over? Well, yeah!

So open your hearts and let Christ in. Let Christ reign within you. Let love conquer your hearts, let it be real, let it be personal, let it be the transforming power of your being. Jesus dies on the cross to take all the pain of the world - including yours and mine - into the heart of God where it can be healed. Jesus dies to take that heavy burden off our poor aching shoulders and backs, to lift the grief from our hearts, to open our secret selves to the radiant streaming light of God. Jesus dies on the cross so that we can see him rise again. And again. And again. Until finally we say to ourselves, “Look. Believe. Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed. Our Saviour lives!” Until we run through our own inner streets shouting the good news - Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!!! We belong to God. God loves us more than life itself. WOW.