

Sermon for April 17, 2022—“The Wisdom of Easter”

Easter, Year C—Text: Luke 23:1-12

There is a kind of worldly wisdom that can leach the color out of life. As, over the course of a lifetime, we gradually accumulate experience of the way the world works, life can begin to lose its capacity to surprise us. We can come to believe that we’ve seen it all that there is—as Ecclesiastes tells us—nothing new under the sun. We can catch ourselves reciting mouthing old clichés about death and taxes, and the futility of human striving.

When we encounter idealism, we are inclined to feel condescension, cynicism, or pity. Expressions of hope, elicit from us a sad smirk, or a world-weary shrug. Even if we continue to say the “right” things to the young about life’s infinite possibilities, it can feel as if we’re sheltering them from harsh realities. We say to ourselves: Let them dream while they can.

G. K. Chesterton believed that like individuals, civilizations could grow old, and fall prey to a world-weary wisdom. The result was a loss of cultural flexibility—and of the capacity to innovate. He contended that by the time of Christ the Greco-Roman civilization, too, was growing old and stale. A consensus was growing that everything that could be thought had been thought. Nothing could happen that had not already happened. Hope for change was simply an illusion. What really mattered were wealth and privilege, power and pleasure.

But before this conventional wisdom could solidify, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, and the world was made young again. Here was something new under the sun. If this could happen, anything could. The world was infused anew with a sense of hope and wonder. Now, the mighty could be cast down, and the lowly lifted up. Now life—not death—had the last word.

So many works of art, throughout the millennia, try to capture what happened that first Easter. Some, at least in my mind, do a better job than others, but that’s just me. While I like the classics, I also happen to be quite fond of some of the more contemporary stuff. You’ll find some examples in the bulletin.

As we look at them, or even as we ponder (as we should) the meaning and significance of Easter, we might be inclined to consider whether our own culture is growing old, and set in its ways in the way Chesterton described, and whether it might, as a result, be altogether indifferent to the good news of the Resurrection. I believe that a very strong argument can be made for that.

Still—and this is my prayer—that this year we might let our reflection on Easter be introspective and allow it to change us. We could allow our hearts to be filled with gratitude for this glorious feast of Easter, which yearly makes of our Lord’s Resurrection, a gift of new life to each of us. We could allow it to keep us child-like enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. We could search out dark corners of our assumptions about life, into which the good news of Easter has not yet penetrated, and throw them open to the light of the risen Christ. We could allow the blessed hope, holy wonder, and sacred imagination of Easter to dissipate the haze of self-fulfilling prophecies that masquerades as wisdom, so that only the Wisdom who is Christ abides.

In closing, I want to share a poem I came across this past week. It's entitled *He Is Risen*, by Ellwood Haines Stokes.

He is risen! Christ the holy,
He the Christ who once was slain;
He the earth-born, lone and lowly,
Bursts the tomb and lives again.

Grace divine to men abounded.
Grave, sin, hell, are all confounded.

He is risen! Men despising,
Truths of God revealed in time;
Risen! to His foes surprising,
To His friends a joy sublime;
Risen? Yes, alive forever,
Christ, of endless life the giver.

Risen! Risen! Every nation
Join the universal joy;
Let the song fill all creation.

Men and angels' tongues employ,
Saddened hell and gladdened heaven.
Death is conquered, Christ is risen!

Risen! Risen! Joy forever,
Christ is victor, death in chains.
Grave shall gain dominion never,
Jesus lives, Messiah reigns!

Thrill the earth with the glad story.
We shall reign with Him in glory!

Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen indeed!
Amen and amen.