

First Light

When you think of Easter, what comes to mind? Baskets with green, stringy plastic straw? Maybe it's a big lunch at a loved one's home. Or painting eggs with wet, dripping watercolors and letting them dry on a dish drainer near the sink. Perhaps it's a touching church service that still tugs at your heart. For some, it is a solemn reminder of a friend or family member that won't be home this year. In a lot of ways, this one weekend of the year is a strange mixture of heaven and earth. There are chocolate bunnies, Easter baskets, plastic eggs filled with candy, potlucks, and maybe a kite-flying contest in the afternoon's warm sunshine. And then there are sober services where re-enactments of Golgotha to Calvary create an indelible image of Christ's last day in the minds of all who watch. The recitation of the final gospel chapters and the singing of hymns in praise, wonder and admiration for the gift of all gifts granted to those who submit to the risen Savior. Easter has quite a variety of faces.

Of all the scenes where Jesus had the crowd in the palm of his hand, it was on the shore of Galilee that he could have been voted in as king. He arrived at the water's edge one day and the people came. By the hundreds, they came - to be healed, fixed, attended and to praise this amazing man who could do anything! And then he even held a feast. With seven loaves and a few fish, he fed the crowd of 10,000. In the eyes of his chosen twelve, this was perhaps the most successful presidential campaign day ever. But then he decided to leave and go north to another community, leaving the hype and the momentum behind. It was then in this Roman town of Caesarea Philippi that Jesus broke the news to his disciples that the end of his life was near and he would "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16:21). And who better to challenge him on this ludicrous idea than Peter. "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Matthew 16:22-23).

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Thus, the tug-of-war between heavenly calling and earthly trappings continues to this day. There's nothing wrong with Easter eggs or big lunches or casted renditions of the crucifixion on a stage at the church building. Its ok to sing songs of endless praise and to also bite into a yellow marshmallow peep. What matters most is what Jesus says is the true Easter admonition in Matthew 16:24-25: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it". Easter 101. Simple, straight-forward and to the point. There is not a thing on earth we can do to get closer to the real sentiment of what Easter means than to reach to heaven with everything we own, hold or love. In that single afternoon lesson to his disciples, Jesus told his followers for generations to come that he knew he would have to die in order to rise. And then he turns right around and says we need to do the same. Lose self, gain life.

- As we embrace this special day in our world and all that it means, may we also consider that it is a calling of every disciple to re-enlist in the greatest army of cross-carriers ever assembled. Maybe its on days like Easter Sunday that the world can see the beautiful connection of heaven's citizens living in earthly cities. But it is much more likely that the world will really notice the risen Christ by how it sees us live every other day of the year.
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