

Isaiah 25:6-9
John 20:1-10

About time

“A certain flock of geese lived together in a barnyard with high walls around it. Because the corn was good and the barnyard was secure, these geese would never take a risk.

One day, a philosopher goose came among them. He was a very good philosopher, and every week they listened quietly and attentively to his learned discourses. ‘My fellow travellers on the way of life,’ he would say, ‘can you seriously imagine that this barnyard, with great high walls around it, is all there is to existence?’

I tell you, there is another and a greater world outside, a world of which we are only dimly aware. Our forefathers knew of this outside world. For did they not stretch their wings and fly across the trackless wastes of desert and ocean, of green valley and wooded hill? But alas, here we remain in this barnyard, our wings folded and tucked into our sides, as we are content to puddle in the mud, never lifting our eyes to the heavens which should be our home.’

The geese thought this was very fine lecturing. ‘How poetical,’ they thought. ‘How profoundly existential. What a flawless summary of the mystery of existence.’

Often the philosopher spoke of the advantages of flight, calling on the geese to be what they were. After all, they had wings, he pointed out. What were wings for, but to fly with? Often, he reflected on the beauty and the wonder of life outside the barnyard, and the freedom of the skies.

And every week the geese were uplifted, inspired, moved by the philosopher’s message. They hung on his every word. They devoted hours, weeks, months to a thoroughgoing analysis and critical evaluation of his doctrines. They produced learned treatises on the ethical and spiritual implications of flight. All this they did.

But one thing they never did. They did not fly! For the corn was good, and the barnyard was secure!” (Søren Kierkegaard)

(Hold that thought!)

The difference between Easter and Good Friday is not the difference between life and death.

The difference between Easter and Good Friday is not the difference between now and some distant, promised future.

And the difference between Easter and Good Friday is not the difference between a question and an answer.

Good Friday and Easter do not differ in any such way, despite how often we hear them contrasted like this. The difference between Good Friday and Easter is just the mode in which they say the *same* thing. To speak of Good Friday and Easter is to extend an invitation to answer a question: What is the nature of the time in which we live?

On Good Friday, we saw Jesus’ refusal to take seriously the time-telling of Pilate and the other worldly powers. These had determined that now is the time of death’s shadow, and our lives should be ordered accordingly. But Jesus refused to be untrue simply

because of the threat of death. In this, his death was a *triumph* and no simple moral catastrophe. The cross indicated in its opposite Jesus' sense of the times as *alive*.

The Resurrection similarly re-reads the time of the world, which

brings us to our text from John today, and in fact just the first few words in the Greek: "...on the first day of the week". In this seemingly harmless little detail we can read the whole significance of the Easter event. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, the news of the resurrection begins to break. Or, more profoundly, in that still-darkness of this particular "first day", God says once more, Let there be light.

This particular "first day of the week" – is the first day of the *new* creation, when again the chaotic deep and void are disrupted by divine order, when death is shown to have been defeated as a life-denying power and shadow over human life. *With the resurrection of Jesus, the times change: our experience of the nature and potency of our time changes.*

This is the equivalence of Good Friday and Easter: Jesus' freedom on Friday is now revealed as our own possibility, if we would accept it. The Resurrection is no mere "nature" miracle – no mere display of divine power over natural death. It is a *vindication* of the Jesus whose death looked like the triumph of barnyard fear, which makes the resurrection less a natural miracle than a social and political judgement. The point of the proclamation of the Resurrection is not that *anyone* might have been raised from the dead, but that *Jesus* was risen – a re-assertion of the one who was discarded. Jesus' refusal to acquiesce to the life-denying, death-imposing powers is vindicated: the one who is said to have been raised is declared – *in that raising* – to be one who died innocently and unjustly, but also freely and without fear of death.

The event of Jesus' resurrection, then, is not simply the undoing of the death anyone of us might die. It shines a light back on *him* and says, *Die like this* – which is not to say, Go and get yourself crucified, but rather, Live not in the shadow of death.

This is to say that Easter *doesn't* present to us a problem about whether or not the dead can rise; this is just too abstract, too preliminary. Easter rather presents a question: "What time is it?" Is it the time of death and decay, or the time for life?

Or, to put it differently, together Good Friday and Easter pose a stark and real challenge: Do we believe that anything truly new is possible? Because if the dead no longer stay where we put them, everything is up for grabs.

"It was the first day of the week..." It is *today* the first day of the week, not because it is Sunday but because a new kind of day has dawned – the day of the new creation, a time alive with possibility. And so, in a sense, *every* day becomes that first day of the week because in the new creation *all* days are now days on which we might hear that Christ is risen; all days are now days in which, if we would allow it, we too might be drawn into the light of the new creation; all days are now days in which hope might be lived and rejoicing might be heard.

It is usually the case that, under the threat of death, of failure, of loss, we search out places where the corn is good and the barnyard is secure.

But, in Good Friday's Easter and Easter's Good Friday, all that belongs to Jesus is given to us: the cross, the grave, the sky.

And so the new time of Easter is the possibility that we might fly.
