



The Lord is Risen... The Lord is Risen Indeed!

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In May, 2019, I attended an international conference held at the Orthodox Academy on the island of Crete, Greece. This conference brought together key theologians from the six major Christian ecclesial families: Evangelical, Historic Protestant, Independent, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic. Participants at this, the second meeting of the GFTE¹, came from all parts of the world. Being at an Orthodox Academy we were greeted daily with the beautiful statement “The Lord is Risen”, to which one is to reply “The Lord is Risen Indeed”. It is a wonderful greeting to exchange with each other,

¹ GFTE – Global Forum of Theological Educators. In 2003 in Bossy, Switzerland, I had the assignment to bring together key theological leaders from various Evangelical groups to meet with their counterparts from the World Council of Churches, Geneva. At that meeting I was asked to enlarge the group to include theological educators from all the six major Christian families, namely: Evangelical, Historic Protestant, Independent, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic. The first meeting was held in 2016 in Dorfweil, near Frankfurt, Germany. Twenty key theological educators from each of the six groups, a total of 120 scholars, came. It was the first such meeting ever where all the six groups gathered together in one place.

Only two weeks prior to the GFTE Conference – right after Easter, 2019 – I was asked to preach and teach in a church of refugees in the Iran region, Middle East. Everything was translated into the Farsi language, the language of the Persian Church. I was asked to preach and teach on the fact that **“Jesus Christ has risen indeed and that He is alive”**. **The assigned Bible text was Luke 24:13-25**. The underlying, fundamental Biblical truth is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to our Christian faith.

Several years ago I was asked to speak on the same topic to a large group of theological students and faculty at The Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul, Korea. The theme was “An Encounter with the Risen Lord.”² For the students I called my presentation “From Stupidity to Ecstasy”. A very long and fruitful discussion followed the lecture, especially because of my opening question, “How can we be very stupid, ignorant, and blind in interpreting the Bible and at the same time very excited – even ecstatic – about our interpretation and totally committed to it? It seems that the one does not cancel out the other.” These young and future leaders of the church needed an explanation which I summarized in the following seven points.

Let me begin with a simple story about an everyday activity: two people walking along a road. The two people (probably a man and his wife) are walking home on a Sunday afternoon. As is the custom, the wife walks a step or two behind her husband. They do not talk happily with each other. They are disappointed and upset, completely exhausted and frustrated. Not a glimpse of hope in the eyes of either of them. One does not need much imagination to put one’s own names into a scenario like this. How often we are disappointed with what happens around us, and how often we feel hopeless and clueless about our todays and our tomorrows.

I Jesus is always with us; we are never alone

The change for these two people came unexpectedly. A stranger overtook them, but they did not recognize that this stranger who joined them was Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene also had not recognized the risen Lord, nor had the disciple at first at the Sea of Galilee. Jesus just appeared, joined them, and listened in on their conversation as they walked along. He appeared in another form from that to which they were accustomed (Mark 16:12), and they did not expect him.

² The presentation was published in the Korean language book (English translation: “Speak to us: Messages from The Torch Trinity Chapel”) Seoul: Torch Trinity, 2016.

Jesus is our traveling companion, too, accompanying us on all our journeys. When we least expect him, when we are weak and feeble, when we are walking *away* from Jerusalem, he is so intimately close to us, concerned about us, filled with love for us. It is the most exciting and comforting fact that the risen Lord and Savior – one person of the triune God – is with us all the time. We are never alone. He walks with us and he stays with us. He hears us, sees us, and even knows our thoughts and all our secrets.

As the stranger joined the two on the road to Emmaus, he asked a penetrating question, “You seem frustrated, without hope. Why?” In the ensuing conversation he made some very strong statements to his traveling companions: “You fools!” he said. “You are very slow to grasp the truth. You are *Dummkopf!* (You are stupid!)”

Jesus wants to participate in every sphere of our lives, even if we are very confused, frustrated, or even angry.

II In the presence of Jesus we can say anything

Cleopas and his companion (wife?), the two walking along the road to the village of Emmaus (probably Kubebe today), had hoped that their leader, Jesus Christ, would redeem and restore Israel. They did not understand the purpose for Christ’s coming: the Cross, the Resurrection, the divine eternal glory. They did not understand that he was the Creator God, who had become a human being; that he in his own person replaced the temple building with all its sacrificial offerings when he, as the ultimate sacrifice, went to the cross. They did not understand that when the curtain in the most holy part of the temple was ripped apart the old was finished and the emphasis was now on establishing a new earth, a new heaven, a heavenly Jerusalem – the Kingdom of God. Their expectations were self-centered, as are the expectations of many of us today. They did not see the big picture, the ultimate picture – the purpose and vision of Jesus Christ.

The disciples were sad and disappointed, and in need of help. But before Jesus helped by giving the word of life, they had to spell out their frustrations, doubts and disbelief. Only an empty vessel can he fill (John 4: the account of the Samaritan woman). He challenged them, asking them to be more precise about what it was that made them so sad and gave them such a feeling of hopelessness. During the first part of this “dialogical prayer,” Jesus was listening patiently, taking all the time that was needed. With his two simple questions, he tried to focus on the issues which were hurting them, without giving room for anything unnecessary. He went straight to the point.

III When Jesus speaks, we should listen with head and heart

Still incognito, Jesus began with a rather sharp rebuke: “O foolish people... slow of heart to believe...” (v. 25) He tells it as it is. The two (and many, many others, like us today) fail to understand the necessity of Christ’s suffering and death before he entered into his glory. They knew what the prophets had said (probably had memorized these passages from the Torah) but they did not see the plan of salvation, the plan God has for his kingdom. Christ had to tell them. The natural person will never understand God’s plan unless it is explained to them by Christ, unless enlightenment is given through God’s Spirit.

It seems that most people build their hopes on obtaining the most advantage for themselves. Every theological position interprets the Scriptures in such a way as to support their point of view, to seek the fulfillment of their expectations. Most theologians are unwilling to even attempt to recognize other positions, different understandings of the teachings of Scripture, each claiming that their position is right and all others are wrong. The rift between the various groups grows deeper and wider, to the point that building bridges often seems impossible. We may need to evaluate and readjust our own expectations and interpretations.

In my quest for those expectations that are legitimate (the *correct* biblical interpretation), as opposed to those that are not, I am reminded of the simple formula I was given as a child, “In every situation ask yourself ‘What would Jesus have said? What would Jesus have done?’ and you will be very close to the right answers. I would simply like to follow this advice and search for “the Jesus answer.” I believe that by searching the Scriptures honestly, with an open mind and without focusing on our own expectations, we can find out not merely what Jesus “would have” said but also what Jesus “would have” done.

The Lord went with the two travelers, guiding them into all truth. He presented a comprehensive view of all Messianic prophesies and their fulfillment. Jesus thus declared that he was the heart of the Old Testament Scripture.

... he was the substance of every Old Testament sacrifice ordained in the Messianic law...

... he was the true deliverer and king...

... he was the coming prophet, the true high priest...

... he was, and he is, the key to all of Scripture...

Emphasis here was also on the glorification of the resurrected Christ in the present. There was no mention of the Parousia.

These simple words, but also eternal revelation, kindled a fire within the hearts of these two people. Later they testified, “Did not our hearts burn

within us while he opened the Scripture to us..?” (v. 32) When Jesus Christ is the center of our normal conversation, of our biblical discussions, of our prayers, divine fire is poured out. The heart, with all its emotional faculties, begins to pound, and the head, with all its logical faculties, follows. Our totality is affected. Holistic ministry takes place.

A brief theological discourse on “Jesus and the Land”

Throughout history this text (Luke 24:13-35) has often been used in the debate about the Holy Land.

Jesus knew the Old Testament better than we do. He knew that His Father had made a promise to Abraham about this land. He was aware that this land was the place where God’s revelation took place. He recognized that, for the Jews, God and the Land of Israel were inseparable. Jesus knew the rabbis’ teaching, their prayers, and their blessings, in which the land was always a central theme. Jesus himself, however, never focused on the land in his prayers or his teaching. He showed no interest in Israel as a Kingdom – nor was it important to him that he was a part of it (John 6:15). To the authorities Jesus said, “Yes, I am a king, but my kingdom is not from here.” Jesus was the ruler of a different kingdom (John 18:36-37).

Jesus was sent by his Father as the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Covenant, including the land, and to establish a New Covenant through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

For us today, to insist on holding on to some parts of the Old Covenant means not to recognize Jesus Christ in his totality.

As the one and only Messiah, Jesus’ teaching focused only on the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Heaven. This new teaching about God’s kingdom was completely opposite to the commonly held understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant and the emphasis on the city of Jerusalem and the temple and its priesthood and sacrifices. With Christ, the new covenant is established and the old is no more. This is the Good News: the fulfillment of the promises made in the old covenant (John 3:16-17).

The Palestinian theologian Alex Awad describes the change from the Old Covenant to the New as follows:

In the Old Covenant we had Israel, which in the New Covenant becomes all believers.

In the Old Covenant we had the Promised Land, which in the New Covenant becomes the Kingdom of God.

In the Old Covenant we had the city of Jerusalem; in the New Covenant we have the heavenly Jerusalem.

In the Old Covenant we had the temple mount; in the New Covenant we have the hearts of believers.

In the Old Covenant we had the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites; in the New Covenant we have Christ and the believers.

In the Old Covenant we had animal sacrifices; in the New we have Jesus Christ on the cross.

Jesus did not teach that the Jews had a right to own the land. He did not even express criticism of the foreign occupation. At Jacob's Well he told the Samaritan woman that the holy places in Samaria and Judea (Gerasim and Jerusalem) would be replaced by worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed sees the divine space shifted from a physical place to himself. He said, "I am the gateway to heaven" (John 1:51). The entire prologue of John's gospel testifies that Christ's entering the world signals not only a cosmic change but also a complete change in a person's relationship with God. God came to dwell among us as a new living tabernacle, replacing the old tabernacle made with stones, and by faith in Christ his followers become the heirs of Abraham's original promise, indeed a New Covenant (Hebrews 11). About the Kingdom of God the British theologian Stephen Sizer states, "The Kingdom which Jesus inaugurated is spiritual in character, international in membership, and gradual in expansion. And the expansion of this kingdom throughout the world would specifically require their exile from the land. They must turn their backs on Jerusalem and their hopes of ruling there with Jesus in order to fulfill their new role as ambassadors of his kingdom. (Matthew 20: 20-28; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21). . ." The followers of Christ, the church, were sent out into the world to make disciples of all nations but never were they told to return. Instead, Jesus promised to be with them wherever they are in the world (Matthew 28:18-20). The new covenant that Christ established is the global kingdom of God for all who believe in him, Jews and Gentiles alike.

The term "replacement theology" is correct if by it we understand Jesus the Messiah's replacement of the Old Covenant, with its kingdom of Israel, by the New Covenant, with the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven. An even better term than replacement theology would be fulfillment theology. Israel, described throughout the Old Testament as the vine rooted in the land in order to bring fruit, finds its fulfillment in Jesus' statement "I am the true vine and there is no fruit outside of me" (John 15). In God's vineyard membership is granted only to those grafted into Christ, the true vine. He promises to everyone who remains in Him a room in the New Jerusalem, which fulfills and replaces the old promises of the land and the city of Jerusalem. Christ not only replaces the physical space of the land and the city, but He becomes the center of God's kingdom because He is one with the Father. There

is no provision for holding on to the “Kingdom of Israel” which is defined by ancestral borders.

Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple, as well as of His own death, came true, but only Jesus was raised up again, not the temple. Nowhere, according to Scripture, did Jesus say that the old temple has to be rebuilt. Christ’s followers find in the relationship with Him, the Son of God, what Jews were hoping for in the old promise of the land. The early church had no territorial theology. Their commitment was to tell others that “Christ is alive!” It is indeed significant that when the stranger on the road to Emmaus spoke of Christ’s new concept of the kingdom our two travelers became ecstatic. Their hearts were on fire, and when their eyes were opened to see their Lord they immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell others. When the Samaritan woman realized who the Messiah was, she left everything behind and became one of the first missionaries of the New Testament era. The jump from blindness and stupidity to ecstasy comes when the focus is on Jesus, the living Christ. When the focus moves to Jesus, the living Christ, the issues of Land, Jerusalem, and temple become obsolete. Peter Walker sums it up in this way: “The classical Christological interpretation of the Old Testament promises, far from being the result of a later Gentile ‘spiritualizing’ tendency, stems instead from the Jesus of history. Jesus of Nazareth dared to forge a new hermeneutic which placed himself and his work at the center of the spiritual narrative. . . It remains a mammoth claim, but those who accept it have no option but now to read the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. As he told the Emmaus disciples, the Scriptures were written concerning himself (Luke 24:27).”³

So much for this brief theological discourse. Let us now return to the chapel presentation.

IV Jesus must have a central place in all areas of our life

Like any traveler, Jesus was simply passing through. He never forces himself upon anybody (Rev. 3:20). But the two on the road to Emmaus constrained him, inviting him to continue the blessed fellowship time they had been having (Gen. 18:3; 32:26; Judges 6:18). They not only invited him into their home, but they gave him the place of honor. The “dialogical prayer” they had just experienced and the burning of their hearts gave them new hope, their reason gave them glimpses of more to come. They gave the Lord a central position

³ More reading on the topic “Jesus and the Land” see the added bibliography. The references made in the paper are included in the list and indicated by *.

because they wanted him to give them more of the spiritual food of which they had already received a part on the way.

It is important to understand that our two friends wanted more from the stranger. Often we have fellowship with Christ in our church and bible study, or at small or large conferences and activities, but to invite him into our homes, into our private lives, is often avoided at all cost. We want to be in control of the private spheres of our lives.

There is no mention of a re-enactment of the Lord's Supper, and these two followers probably knew very little, if anything, about it. Through simple intuition (coming from burgeoning hearts) and a clear conviction (coming from an enlightened mind) they naturally gave Jesus the place of headship. He was invited as a guest, but he became the host. With the prayerful request, "Abide with us", a miracle happened: "their eyes were opened."

V Jesus never separates blessing and giving

Treated as host by the two followers, Christ now shared the meal with them. He probably spoke the customary blessing on the food, but he surely reflected in his prayer all the experiences of that day. He was a new creation (it was the precise day of his resurrection). He was no longer bound by earthly elements. It was the climax of the entire day's experiences. It was a blessing with a new meaning of triumphal victory. Every prayer after Easter morning reflects the blessing of the resurrection. The new era of "victory over everything" restructures all communication between creator and creation.

The two recognized Jesus in the breaking/sharing of the bread. Although some theologians have suggested that the marks of the nails in the Lord's hands were noticed, I believe much more that the manner in which he unified triumphal prayer/blessing with the breaking/sharing was the key of this recognition miracle. As risen Lord, Jesus makes clear that through thankful sharing (dividing with others) divine multiplication power is wondrously released. Already earlier in his ministry Jesus had demonstrated this precept as, for instance, in the miracle of the feeding of the multitude (Mark 6:37-44). Now, however, having victoriously overcome even death with all its material implications, glimpses of heavenly values are communicated.

VI Recognizing Jesus as the Christ means serving Him

Jesus did not simply leave the home following this encounter. He disappeared instantaneously. He left them alone to decide for themselves what to do with this new knowledge. He went as far as he would go. They recognized him fully for what he was: their risen Lord and Master. There was no sadness or regret

because of his departure. Rather, they were empowered by it to get up quickly and to share the news with others. The good news of Christ's resurrection and of his biblically based breaking/sharing exercise can never be kept hidden. Recognizing him implies sharing him, what he is and what he has done. The only appropriate response to this dialogical prayer experience with Christ was to proclaim his victory.

These two followers overcame fear, hopelessness, even physical fatigue. Every moment counted; it was a matter of real life and death. During the late evening hours their testimony back in Jerusalem was an enormous encouragement for the other disciples, changing their hearts. The fire kindled in the hearts of these two was so strong that it set others on fire, possibly a foretaste of Pentecost.

One could spend hours, days, and months sharing what men and women have done in serving God throughout history and time. The so-called first wave of mission, from the early church to the Reformation, service showed enormous sacrifice and dedication, missionaries often paying with their own lives. Many of the religious orders were founded for serving Christ, and Christianity spread from the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe to many other areas, and the message of Jesus and his resurrection reached many foreign shores. The second wave of mission combined the preaching of the gospel with social ministry, and for hundreds of years almost an explosion took place. Wherever a revival took place, people's lives were changed. The slogan was "We must tell the world that Christ is alive and we must demonstrate our faith with action." The third wave of mission is basically our generation. Are you, students and faculty, part of it? Every Christian is a missionary and every non-Christian a mission field.

VII Reflection and Application

Jesus demonstrates that he is closer to his people than they will ever know; he has time to listen...

Jesus demonstrates that he is able to fill us with his presence if we are empty vessels...

Jesus demonstrates that he himself is the key to all Scripture; when he speaks our hearts are on fire...

Jesus demonstrates that he is the first, the last, the living one; there is none like him...

Jesus demonstrates that prayer/blessing and breaking/sharing are inseparable – biblical stewardship...

Jesus demonstrates that to know him means to serve him faithfully and with integrity...

Jesus demonstrates that life with him is everything, and he invites you and me to participate...

And it all began with a simple dialogical prayer.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Amen

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