

## **"IT TAKES TWO WINGS TO SOAR"**

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Have you noticed with the rise of spring flowers, pussy willows and longer light-filled days, the birds have also returned? Bluejays, robins, and cardinals, they're all back in full force. Maybe you enjoy their songs as you go out on your morning stroll. Maybe you notice their intricate flights, cavorting from ground to shrubs and back to the trees to build their nests.

Pope John Paul noticed these winged creatures as a metaphor of springtime and Easter. Similar to Jesus saying, "Consider the birds of the air, and how God knows and cares for them," in like manner John Paul wrote, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves." I love that image, the poetry of it, the charm of it, the living truthfulness of it---both of earth and sky.

It is worth saying in a day when many regard faith and reason as inherently incompatible, as at cross-purposes. The pope synchronizes them, claiming each holds up its own side.

Seeking to soar upward, it is upon wings of faith and reason. Pope John Paul called philosophy "one of the noblest of human tasks." He also valued the truths of empirical science. Yet the deepest mysteries of life will not yield themselves to human reason alone. Reason can't answer questions like, "for what purpose are we here?" Or "who are we, finally?"

Mindful of reason's limits, God graciously discloses deepest truth through revelation, personal truths of deepest meaning. The truth disclosed by God's revelations are not the result of our arguments and proofs. We'd remain in the dark without God's revelations here. We need two wings to take off, to soar aloft, scan the heavens, get the big perspective.

Have you ever seen a bird attempt to fly with only one wing? A bird, say, with a wounded wing? It isn't really flying, is it? They barely get off the ground. As we corral it to splint that damaged wing, it fearfully scampers and flits away only a few feet. It is a pathetic sight. For in that moment, whichever wing it lost, it neither belongs on the ground or in the sky.

I know Christians like that bird. For them it isn't enough that Scripture fills out the top shelf of truth, the most essential matters of our lives, illuminating our nature and purpose. They also want obscure details of the Bible, specific to its time and place, to have the final word on everything from the evolution of the species to how women and men must relate today.

I also know atheists like that wounded bird. It isn't enough that reason and science can cure diseases, build skyscrapers, and revolutionize communications. They also want the facts of cause and effect to define human worth and express the meaning of life. And so here, of course, our worth and meaning are not worth so much as our God esteems us.

This morning I am talking about truth, what it is, how it is understood, how it shapes us. The pope claims that something within us humans long to know the truth, the whole truth. He is right. Human beings long for the fullness of truth, its full height, breadth, and depth. If we wish to soar so loftily during our brief lifetime, I tell you, it won't happen on one wing. John Paul insisted, to take flight and enter our full destiny, we are two-winged creatures.

And this morning--did you notice?--we return to Easter with opening and closing hymns. These hymns make tremendous truth claims. They summon visions of grandeur and oneness more than we could invent for ourselves and more than we could ever hope for. We want to embrace all of it, but part of us holds back. How can we trust the truth of their proclamation of Jesus as risen Lord--victorious, alive, present, available to you and me?

That question is not answerable by reason alone. It can only be answered in the way I John claims. Did you hear how the epistle opens? "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. We are writing these things to you so our joy may be complete." That Word of Life is of course none other than Jesus.

In one way or another, just like Jesus appeared to the lost, frightened, despondent disciples who cowered trembling behind locked doors, the risen Christ must also appear to us. Christ has to appear to us, not through any arguments or case that we are able to make, but through touch, seeing and hearing: through a personal experience of Jesus presence.

Last week I enjoyed meeting our third graders, gathered today in our front pews with their parents. We considered the meaning of bread and cup on this table. Do you recall our visit Chloe, Riley, Erika, Bennett, Thea, Katherine, Calaghan, Samantha, and Caroline?

Rapping my knuckle on this pulpit, I said I can only stand up here for so long, making a case for Jesus risen, alive and at work in the world, proclaiming by thoughtful persuasion. Ultimately, I told them, the good news of Jesus has to become personal. And this table with these elements of Jesus' loving sacrifice, makes our experience of Jesus personal.

The bread and cup are where, in the words of I John, we see with our eyes, we look and touch with our hands, we experience close and intimate contact with the Word of Life. The bread and cup are where we, in the words of Psalm 34, taste and see that the Lord is good! What could be more personal than experiencing Jesus through all of our senses!

And, guess what, once we get used to seeing and touching the risen Jesus here, maybe out there, as we cast our lot with those Jesus cared about, we will see him in their eyes. We talked about how this table gets us beyond living too much out of our heads alone; how this table make real and immediate to us how God loves and addresses each of us.

Most interesting to me was how these third graders have watched us and wondered what the big deal was. What it all means. Why it is important. Why it feels like in this moment of simple communing with God and with one another, it almost feels like time stands still. Being on the outside of that looking in, it only made them more interested, more curious. I

explained to them that we hadn't asked them to wait because we wanted to exclude them. We had them wait because we wanted them grown enough to fully appreciate this personal encounter with our living Lord. Yes, the bread and the cup are modest compared to the rich feasts of restaurants and homes. But no grander table was ever set than this one.

Today, the Fifth Sunday of Easter, I invite you to let the good news of Christ resurrected become personal to you, sharing this simple meal. I invite you to grasp the difference Easter makes, offering these foodstuffs we gather to feed our neighbors who go hungry. I invite you to notice the birds of spring, as they take wing and to soar upon the same spirit.

Is that personal enough? I hope it is. And I hope it engages all of you, not just your brain. I will never be able to talk us into resurrection. But I can make it real. See you at the table. Amen.