

It took the early Christians centuries to arrive at the language we confess every Sunday in our Creed: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father."

It's not the most elegant language. It doesn't just roll off the tongue, unless of course it becomes familiar through repetition. Maybe you've carefully reflected on each phrase, plumbing the depths of meaning. Or maybe you just allow the words to roll over you as your mind drifts to other thoughts. Whatever the case, the language we inherited was forged in a process that was long, slow, messy & least surprising of all: involved politics. Christians debated for generations about how to make sense of Jesus; in particular, how to make sense of the Resurrection.

Imagine for a moment living in those first generations:

What would it mean ABOUT JESUS not just to appear like a ghost, haunting his loved ones, but to conquer death? What would it mean FOR DISCIPLES to follow the risen Jesus in a world that still groaned under the weight of suffering & death?

In those early centuries different Christians explored different options. For instance, maybe Jesus **wasn't really human** (that became known as the heresy of Docetism: he just seemed human but was really more like a spiritual being). Or maybe he **wasn't really God** (that became the heresy of Arianism: he was a special creature—maybe the most special of all—but still a creature and not God).

Each explanation came with its own costs & benefits. The benefit of either

docetism or arianism was at least clarity. That's often the benefit of any heresy. They provide clarity. But they also come with costs. If Jesus **wasn't really human**, the cost was the absence of God's solidarity with us. Docetism reduced Resurrection to something more like virtual reality. If he **wasn't really God**, the cost was the absence of revelation. He wasn't revealing God, he was simply reflecting something more like our day-to-day lives. That's not a bad thing, but it never deserve our worship.

One of the amazing things about the faith we inherited is how it **clung to a mystery**. Our faith clung to a mystery that surpassed even the best language people could muster. They stumbled through awkward phrases like, "eternally begotten, God from God, Light from Light," layering them on top of each other because the faith we inherited **clung to Jesus as both fully human and fully divine**. Not simply less than God. Not simply more than human. Fully God, fully human. It's a mystery that refuses resolution. And for the better part of 2 millennia those of us who inherited this faith have clung to the mystery by confessing it every Sunday, whether we plumb the depths of meaning or simply allow the words to roll over us.

Wherever you are on that spectrum, during Easter we're invited deeper into the mystery. Easter is an invitation, not to resolve the mystery, but to see in the Resurrection once again a mystery that unveils *both* God's solidarity with creation *and* also unveils the focus of our worship. So today let me offer an image that invites us deeper into the mystery of Resurrection.

Here's the image. Our daughter, Penelope, recently discovered her belly button. It's been there (in some shape or form) since she was born. But she just learned to recognize it, and she's pretty excited; so excited that she's happy to show it off. She's also very interested in our belly buttons. If one of us happen to be laying on the floor, she's happy to pull up our shirts and poke our buttons. She has absolutely no idea what a belly button means or why it's there. It's certainly not relevant for her daily life — but **the mystery (of her belly button) has captivated her attention and become a surprising focus of her awareness.**

Some day she'll understand that her her belly button is related to her birth. Some day she'll understand that her belly button is a piece of evidence about where she's come from. Some day she'll understand that she has a belly button because she is like us, and we are like her, at the most fundamental level of our being. **Easter invites all of us newborn Christians to see the Resurrection of Jesus the same way.**

At Easter, we're invited to discover the Resurrection as our new birth. At Easter, we're invited to discover the Resurrection as a piece of evidence about the kind of people we really are. At Easter, we're invited to discover that the Resurrection empowers us to become like Jesus at the most fundamental level of our being. The mystery of Resurrection has caught us by surprise and we've been grasped by this strange mystery that captivates our attention. But the meaning of Resurrection —like a belly button— is something we only learn over the course of

our lives.

In today's reading from Luke, the apostles encounter Resurrection like infants in the presence of the risen Jesus — startled, confused, unsure about what it means. At first the mystery of Resurrection only seems to reveal their difference from Jesus, not their similarity. They only seem to recognize a gap. So Jesus has to spend some time showing them how similar they are. He's real (against that heresy of docetism). They can touch him. He can eat. And he's also the Son of God who can redeem & forgive their sins (against that heresy of arianism where he's a creature who still needs redemption himself).

The Gospel story is portrayed as a moment of shock & awe. And I wonder in that moment if at least part of the reason they're stuck on the differences between them & Jesus is because they doubt they'll ever actually be like him. I wonder if they doubt that at the most fundamental level of their being they can ever grow up in their faith to become someone so faithful & good, so loving & generous, so honest & true; someone so — alive.

What they didn't grasp in that moment was the meaning of Resurrection. So here it is; here's the value of embracing the mystery of our faith; the conviction that Jesus is "eternally begotten... God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God" —the value is that Resurrection means whatever is true of Jesus will also become true of us, starting now. At the Resurrection we're invited to be adopted as God's children and the risen Jesus defines us at the most fundamental

level of our being. We're invited & empowered to be like him. Maybe you already know, but the term "Christian" was originally a derogatory remark that meant "little Christ people." Others were making fun of these no-name fanatics running around the ancient world acting they were God's children. But the label was exactly right because becoming like Jesus is our promise & our inheritance after the Resurrection.

Maybe the reason it's so hard for us to embrace the mystery of Easter is because our world is still so dominated by forces we hear described in our reading from Acts. In Acts, Peter is sharing a message at the Jerusalem temple after healing a man who couldn't walk. Everyone's trying to figure out what just happened. It's mystery. Peter tells them that Jesus is the source of this man's healing, but only after Peter reminds them how much they've failed God. He says:

"you **rejected** the Holy and Righteous One"

"you **killed** the Author of life" (stunning phrase...)

"you acted in **ignorance**"

We don't have to struggle with an inferiority complex to see how those forces of ignorance, rejection & death are all too common in our world. Those are some of the most visible & powerful forces in our world. So at Easter when we come face-to-face with the risen Jesus maybe we're just like those first disciples who struggle to comprehend what kind of creatures we really are. Maybe it's easier to see ourselves defined by ignorance, rejection, or the powers of death. But Easter

invites us to discover that our fundamental identity —and destiny— is defined by Jesus' own faithfulness, goodness, generosity & love.

The earliest followers of Jesus would have struggled to see themselves that way. They would have struggled to see themselves defined by the life of Jesus. Peter, the one who accused onlookers in the book Acts, is also the one from the Gospels who acted in **ignorance**, lashing out with a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter is the one who **rejected** Jesus by denying him 3 times in the courtyard of the high priest. Peter is the one who colluded with **death** when the Author of life was killed. Ignorance, rejection & death defined Peter at the most fundamental level of his being before the Resurrection.

But the mystery of Resurrection invites Peter —and us— to see Jesus as the one who now defines us. Easter means that we're no longer defined by ignorance, death or rejection even though we still live in a world groaning under the weight of death. Easter means we're defined and energized by the Author of life himself.

Some day we'll understand how the Resurrection of Jesus is related to our birth. Some day we'll understand how Jesus' Resurrection is the surprising piece of evidence about our adoption into God's family. Some day we'll understand how the Resurrection means we're destined to become like Jesus at the most fundamental level of our being. In the words of 1 John, "Beloved, we are God's children [already]; what we will be has not yet been revealed. [But] we do know... this: when he is revealed, we will be like him." (1 John 3:2).

Finally, one last thing. When we do come face-to-face with the risen Jesus and we discover what kind of creatures we really are, well then we're not just born into God's new creation. We're also free; not free just to navel gaze at our own belly buttons, admiring ourselves, but free to share Jesus' own faithfulness, goodness, generosity & love; we're free to share the Author of life with all creation. *Amen.*