The Cosmic Grenade

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On Sacrificial Love, the Embarrassing Witness of the Gospels, and the Universal Jesus Who Pulls People Out of the Grave

If Christ Has Not Been Raised

I want to start this midweek message with Paul's logic, because the whole argument of the resurrection-shaped life rests on what Paul says here. *1 Corinthians 15, verse 12*:

> Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up, if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Corinthians 15:12–17)

That is *pretty good logic*. And every one of us ought to sit with it carefully, because Paul's argument cuts both directions. *If the resurrection is true, then every other religious framework is inadequate to fully explain God's plan for this planet.* And let me be careful here; *that is not the same as saying other faiths contain no wisdom*. Many faiths point toward the wisdom that is found in Christ. *But to have a complete reflection of the attitudes of God that were found in Jesus Christ, the resurrection has to be true.* If Jesus was raised from the dead,

then everything in your life can finally be solved, because that is a pretty big deal. *If* he was raised, then what is left for us to be ultimately afraid of? The thing that has held every other human being in fear across every century of history, *death itself*, has been defeated by the One we are claiming to follow. *If he was raised. Everything turns on that if.*

What Only Humans Do

And here is something to hold about human sacrifice as a distinctively human phenomenon. Only humans lay down their lives for friends. You will see pack animals defend their herd against predators: the elephants forming a perimeter around the calves, the wildebeest charging at the lions when the herd is large enough to overwhelm them. But that is defense of the in-group, calculated by force-of-numbers. When a thousand wildebeest face nine lions, the math is in the herd's favor and the herd protects itself. That is not sacrifice. That is collective self-preservation.

Sacrifice is different. Sacrifice is what happens when you are in Tower Two, and you have just seen Tower One drop, and you run up the stairs anyway to try to pull people out of a burning building. People you do not know. Not your pack. Not your tribe. And you go in because something inside you understands that other human beings are worth your life. That is powerful. And we stand in stunned silence at the heroism and valor of those who do it. Across cultures, across centuries, the people who lay down their lives for strangers are recognized as having done the most distinctively human thing a human can do.

There is a story I recently encountered about a Navy SEAL named Michael Monsoor. He was on a rooftop in Iraq with two of his fellow snipers. They were watching enemy movements. And suddenly an enemy fighter lobbed a hand grenade up onto the rooftop, and it landed at Monsoor's feet.

He had a choice. He could have run for the door at the back of the rooftop and saved himself. *The distance from where he was standing to the door was short enough that he probably would have made it.* But the two snipers lying flat on the rooftop next to him would not have made it. *They would have been killed by the blast.* And Michael Monsoor, *without hesitation, dropped onto the grenade himself,* absorbing its full force with his body. He died within about a minute. His two fellow snipers survived because his body had absorbed what would have killed them all.

He received the Medal of Honor posthumously. You can find the video of President George W. Bush weeping as he tried to read the citation to Michael's parents. The high school in Garden Grove, California where Michael had been a student dedicated their stadium to him and placed the trident, the symbol of the Navy SEALs, in the middle of the field. When Michael was buried in San Diego, every Navy SEAL on site that day took the golden trident pin off his own uniform and placed it on the coffin as it was lowered. The men were taking the thing that had become their entire identity and giving it back to the one who had embodied that identity to its full conclusion. No greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

Now hold the structure of what Monsoor did. One man saved two others by absorbing what would have killed them. For that one sacrificial act, a stadium is named after him. A Medal of Honor was issued. An elite Navy warship christened in San Diego in the mid-2000s carries his name. The human race recognizes the act and honors it forever. That is what humanity does with a sacrifice of one for two. The recognition is permanent.

The Cosmic Grenade

Now scale that pattern up to *cosmic dimensions*. *If Jesus was who he said he was*, the Messiah that the prophet Isaiah and the psalmists had been pointing toward for centuries, the One who would be a light to Israel and a light to the Gentiles, the One whose coming would draw the nations to the top of the mountain in Jerusalem to learn his ways and walk in his paths, *then his death on the cross is a sacrificial act on a scale Michael Monsoor's was not*.

Jesus jumped on a cosmic grenade. A grenade that had been going off in the life of humanity since Genesis 3, making every one of us bound to sin and death. All of us throughout our lifetimes have been bound by fears, and many of us still are, even when we are serving the resurrected One. We ought to be able to run into every machine-gun nest with fearlessness, because the One we serve has been raised. I say that aspirationally, not as something I am always capable of doing. But Jesus felt that cosmic bomb. He saw the explosion that had gone off in the human race at the fall. And he stepped into it.

And let me trace what that cosmic grenade had done across the long arc of biblical history. The serpent's voice deceived the first parents in the garden. The next thing we see is Adam blaming his wife for the very fall they had jointly committed. The next thing we see is Adam's sons fighting each other until one of them murders the other. The next thing we see is vengeance escalating across the generations of Cain's line (Genesis 4:23–24: Lamech's seventy-sevenfold vengeance). The next thing we see is the whole earth filled with violence:

"Then God saw the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:12, 11).

Violence filled the earth. Sex and violence. Power moves and sex moves. That was what the world had become consumed by within just a few chapters of Genesis. That was the bomb that had gone off in the human race.

From Judgment to Blessing to Grace

And here is the long arc of how God responded to the human deformation. He tried *judgment first*. The flood. *Take righteous Noah and his family and start over.* And what God discovered, *if I may speak that way*, was that *judgment by water did not solve the problem*. The wickedness that had filled the pre-flood earth worked its way *right out through the ark, right into Noah's children*. By Genesis 9, Ham is mocking his drunken father. By Genesis 11, the whole post-flood family is gathered at Babel building a tower to make a name for themselves. *Same deformation. Different generation.*

And God placed a rainbow in the cloud, the symbol of his covenant promise that he would never again play that role with the human race:

> It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:14–15)

The bow in the cloud. The instrument of war hung up backwards, with the string pointing back toward heaven rather than out toward earth. Some scholars have read the symbolic posture of the bow as significant, that God was hanging up his weapon of judgment so that he would not use it again. He had tried judgment. It had not gotten this done.

So God tried something else. Blessing. He called one wandering Aramean named Abraham:

> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2–3)

In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That was the new strategy. Not destruction of the wicked but blessing flowing outward through one chosen family until the whole earth was reached. And blessing worked a lot more than judgment had worked. Israel was preserved. The line was kept. Across centuries, the promise was carried. But blessing alone did not finish the job either. Israel kept gravitating back toward the Egyptian mindset, the imperial patterns of power and dominance, the idolatries of the surrounding nations. The blessing strategy preserved a remnant but did not transform humanity at its root.

So God moved to the third and final strategy. Grace. Real grace. And what real grace looked like was the Son of God himself stepping into the explosion the deformation had set off, absorbing the blast with his own body, so that the people he was dying for could live. That is what happened at the cross. Judgment had not gotten it done. Blessing had not finished it. Grace, in the form of the sacrificial love of the Son, was the final move. And that final move worked. Because love gets more done than power. Love gets more done than war machines and ideological force and imperial pressure. Love absorbed the violence rather than perpetuating it, and the perpetual cycle finally broke.

The Identity We Take On

And here is the difference between the kingdom of God and every other faith. Every other faith asks something of you. You must do certain acts. You must make certain sacrifices. You must achieve certain levels of moral or spiritual performance to earn the commendation of

the divine. The structure is transactional. You give. The deity gives back. That is the universal structure of every other religious system in history, with variations on the theme.

But not in the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, all we do is align our identity with an identity that is not ours. Our identity is found in Christ. And when we take on his image (when we let this mind dwell in us, which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5)) when we allow ourselves to be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49), we begin to speak and act and move in a way that is unnatural for the world. The world cannot replicate that pattern from its own resources. Only those who have taken on Christ's identity can move in it.

There is an opening sequence in the contemporary television series The Chosen that captures this beautifully. The screen fills with thousands of small gray fish all swimming in the same circle, in the same direction, indistinguishable from one another. And then, one of the fish turns green. And the green fish turns and swims in the opposite direction. And then another fish turns green and follows. And then another. The whole image is of how the kingdom moves: quietly, one at a time, through ordinary lives that have taken on a new color and a new direction.

That is how the kingdom is built. Through the words we speak. Through the lives we live. Through personal sacrifices for people in need. Through lifetimes of prayer for children, for parents, for unbelieving spouses, for unbelieving grandchildren. Over time, something miraculous begins to happen in our lives and the lives of those we have been carrying in prayer. The pattern is gentle. The pattern is patient. The pattern is unstoppable, because it operates on a current that the surrounding world cannot detect or interrupt.

September 11Th, November 22Nd

Now I want to make an argument for the *historical reality* of what came out of the grave on Easter morning, because the resurrection is not merely a doctrine to be believed but *an event with the characteristics of an event*. Hold a comparison with me.

If you are over thirty years old, you know where you were on September 11, 2001 at 7:59 in the morning Eastern Time. You remember the room you were in. You remember the conversation that was interrupted. You remember what you ate that morning, or didn't. You remember the moment the second plane hit and the realization arrived that this was not an accident. *Those memories are encoded differently than your memories of last Tuesday.* They are *indelibly* fixed because of the magnitude of the event.

If you were born well before November 22, 1963, you know where you were when President Kennedy was shot. If you remember January 28, 1986, you know where you were when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded. Major events fix themselves in human memory in ways that ordinary days never do. You may not remember what you ate for breakfast this morning, but you remember the moment the news broke about events of historic magnitude.

This is exactly what happened to the disciples. They had a life-changing event when the resurrected Jesus walked with the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. They had a life-changing event when he appeared in the locked upper room. *They had a life-changing event when Thomas put his finger in the wounds*. And the encoding of those events in the disciples' memory shaped every subsequent decision they made for the rest of their lives. *They were not telling stories they had made up. They were carrying memories they could not forget.*

People Don't Die for Lies They Know Are Lies

And here is one of the strongest arguments for the historical reality of what those disciples experienced. People do not start a religious movement that leads them to martyrdom for something they know to be a lie.

Let me put the argument concretely. Suppose I came to one of you today and said: I have a great idea. Let's break away from this whole Christian thing. We'll write our own book. We'll start our own movement. We will be the scandal of the community. We know this is a Christian region. They will talk about us. CNN will probably show up. The major religious leaders of the area will label us heretics. There will be public outrage. And then, let's say the consequences keep escalating, they begin to believe we are conducting an insurrection against the U.S. government, so we are tried as traitors, which carries a lifetime sentence, possibly the death penalty. Are you in? Let's do it. I'll get the pen and paper.

Nobody signs up for a death sentence for something they know to be a lie. But the early disciples did sign up. Knowingly. Repeatedly. Year after year. Decade after decade. Across the entire arc of the first century, every one of them, with the possible exception of John, went to a violent death rather than recant. That fact is one of the most theologically and historically substantive data-points in early Christian history, and it deserves to be taken seriously.

Look at Peter specifically. Before the death of Jesus, Peter was full of bravado. Lord, I will defend you to the death. I will follow you to prison and to death itself. And Jesus replied: before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. And by the third rooster-crow, Peter, the man who had drawn a sword in the garden and cut off the ear of Malchus, was being undone by the questions of a serving-girl. He cursed. He swore. He denied. He was fearful for his own life because he now knew that Jesus was not going to do what he had thought Jesus was going to do.

The man with the sword in the garden was finished by the time the third rooster crowed. That is who Peter was on Good Friday morning.

And then look at Peter after the resurrection. After thirty-plus years of preaching the gospel, being harassed from city to city, having his goods confiscated and taken away, living like a vagabond, being criticized by the Roman government and cast out of polite Jewish society, that is the last place this man wanted to be by personality, and yet he kept persisting all the way to the point of martyrdom. Tradition holds that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome rather than recant the resurrection.

What changed Peter? People do not change like that for a lie. Something between Good Friday and Pentecost transformed the man who had been undone by a serving-girl into the man who outpreached the entire Sanhedrin and outlasted the imperial machine for thirty years before dying for what he had seen. *The most economical explanation of the change is the one Peter himself gave: He had seen the resurrected Lord, and the seeing had remade him from the inside out.*

The same is true of Paul. Paul did not give up his position of power and authority within the Sanhedrin on a whim. Oh, I am over here killing Christians one day, and now, you know what: I think I will write thirteen books in their favor and hopefully curry favor with this small vagabond group of people who are being moved from Jerusalem to Antioch to Pisidia and out to the uttermost parts of the earth, scattered, harassed, with no political protection or social standing. Yes, I will join that club. Said nobody who was born with a silver spoon in their mouth, ever. People do not surrender every social and political advantage they have for nothing. Paul surrendered them all because something happened on the road to Damascus. The Christ he had been persecuting confronted him. Who are you, Lord, that I am persecuting? And he could not

get the moment out of his head for the rest of his life. Every time he stood before a king or governor, he kept telling the story of that road and that voice.

And he was so compelling that one of the rulers, King Agrippa, could only respond:

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian'" (Acts 26:28).

Paul's testimony was so powerful, so compelling, that even those who had every political reason to dismiss him were nearly persuaded by him. He stood with no political advantages, no legal protection, no social cover, and the testimony itself carried the weight. That is the mark of someone telling the truth. People do not maintain that posture for that long, under that kind of pressure, for something they know is a lie.

The Embarrassing Witnesses

And here is a second argument for the historical reliability of the Gospel accounts, drawn from *higher criticism*, the academic discipline of evaluating ancient documents for truth-claims and the credibility of those claims. *Higher criticism has a specific principle called the criterion of embarrassment*. It says: *if an ancient document includes details that make the author or the author's heroes look bad, those details are more likely to be historically authentic*, because no one writes themselves into embarrassing scenes when they are inventing a hero-narrative.

And now look at what the Gospels include. Imagine Matthew saying to Peter: I have this great idea, Peter. I am going to tell them about the time Jesus turned around and called you Satan (Matthew 16:23). And then I am going to tell them about the time you said you would defend Jesus to the death and ended up denying him three times to a serving-girl (Matthew 26:69–75). And then I am going to put in the story about how Jesus told that Gentile woman from Syrian Phoenicia that her faith was greater than the faith he had found in Israel (Matthew 15:21–28).

Won't that be great for our movement? Everyone is going to laugh at how unimpressive the founding apostles are.

You do not write that way if you are making things up. You do not portray the very disciples who are supposed to carry the message into future generations as the people of little faith whom Jesus repeatedly rebuked. You do not record that the centurion (a Roman occupying officer) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (a Gentile foreigner) were both named as having great faith, while the disciples were repeatedly called those of little faith. The most unlikely human combinations, an occupying military officer and a foreign woman who would not have been allowed in polite Jewish company, were named as exemplars of faith, while the inner circle of disciples was named as exemplars of doubt. That is not how propaganda works. That is how truth works.

And the disciples were sleeping at Gethsemane. After Jesus had said can you not pray with Me one hour?, they slept. While their Lord was about to be killed. That is what the Gospels record. The men who were supposed to carry the movement into the next century were caught asleep in the most consequential prayer-vigil of human history. Those are the heroes the Gospels portray. Three-time deniers. Satan-rebuked. Asleep-at-the-watch. No movement would invent these heroes. They appear in the record because they actually were the people through whom the resurrection-witness was being carried.

The Women at the Tomb

And here is the most striking embarrassment of all. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century, and in Jewish legal practice, women were generally not regarded as competent legal witnesses. If there was a trial in the first century, and a man said that woman saw me on the corner all night, so I could not have committed the murder across town, the legal response was

likely to be: who saw you? That woman over there? We do not trust the testimony of women. They are too emotional.

That was the cultural assumption. And let me be clear, the assumption was wrong. Anyone who has lived a few days in my house knows that my wife is the one who gives you the accurate narrative of what actually happened, and I am the one with the unreliable memory of events. But the first-century assumption was that women's testimony was not reliable in legal contexts. That assumption was woven into Jewish legal practice and into Roman civic culture.

So why on earth would you write your foundational religious text with women as the primary witnesses of the central resurrection event?

> Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it . . . The angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead . . ." (Matthew 28:1–2, 5–7)

Two women. Going to a tomb. Alone. Before dawn. In Roman-occupied territory. And finding the tomb open and the body gone. Mary Magdalene encounters Jesus directly, and he says:

> Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

Go to My brethren. The Greek verb behind go and tell in this passage is apangellein, to bear an apostolic message. Jesus is sending Mary Magdalene as an apostle to the apostles. The first commission to bear the resurrection-witness is given to a woman, in a culture where women's testimony was not considered legally competent. And where does Mary find the male disciples when she arrives with the apostolic message? Behind locked doors. Hiding. Fearful that the Romans were coming to take them away to the funny farm, as it were. Mary had gone alone to a graveyard at dawn under Roman occupation. The men were huddled inside with the doors barred.

If you were writing a foundational religious document for a machismo first-century Greco-Roman audience, would you ever start it like this? Of course not. You would write: Peter said to John, let us go down there. Those filthy Romans are not going to lay hands on his body. Strap on your swords, boys. Let us go. And the men would run down to the tomb, fight off the guards heroically, and when they opened the seal, Jesus would be standing there saying, well done, lads, exactly what I was hoping you would do. Now let us go and conquer. That is how you would write the founding scene of a movement in a culture that valued machismo.

But the Gospels do not write it that way. The Gospels record that the men stayed behind locked doors, fearful for their lives, while the women went out to see where Jesus lay. And the women brought the message back. Nobody would invent that narrative if they were trying to launch a credible first-century religious movement. The detail is in the record because it is historically what happened. And it is one of the most theologically significant signals that the Gospels are telling us what really happened on that morning, rather than what would have been convenient to invent.

A Story From the Netherlands

One of the older sisters in our assembly received a phone call this week from a friend in the Netherlands. *The friend was distraught.* She was crying so hard she could barely speak. She wiped tears away mid-sentence. There were several layered burdens she was carrying. She had a husband who was not a believer and she did not know how to witness to him. She had children she did not know how to talk to about the gospel. *And she was carrying the particular grief of a coworker whose seven-year-old son had been diagnosed with cancer*, and the boy's family had no Christian background to lean on as they faced the unimaginable.

And our sister was caught off-guard. What do you say to a friend in tears about a seven-year-old who is going to die without ever having heard the gospel? She felt the inadequacy of the moment, the inadequacy of doctrinal phrases she could have offered, the inadequacy of the standard religious framings she had been raised with. And she felt the Spirit's prompting to talk about the resurrected life rather than to lecture about doctrine. She turned to the passage about Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20), and she read the verse where the resurrected Jesus speaks Mary's name and Mary recognizes him. She could not read it without weeping. And her friend on the other end of the line was weeping too, sitting in her own house in the Netherlands, reading her Bible along with our sister.

A God who would weep at the tomb of Lazarus before raising him; that is not the God who lets a seven-year-old boy die without ever having heard the story. The Jesus who wept in John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible, the only verse that records Jesus going to a place of grief so deep that the Greek word is splanchnistheis, a word that means he was moved in his deepest interior, that Jesus is not the God who consigns the seven-year-old to permanent darkness without any hope. That is the substance of what our sister was able to offer her friend

across the Atlantic. And the offering carried weight on the other end of the line, exactly as it carries weight here.

All Who Are in the Graves Will Hear His Voice

And here is the theological substance underneath what our sister offered her friend. *The resurrection means more than the resurrection of Jesus alone. It means a general resurrection of every human being who has ever lived.* And the assessment that follows that general resurrection *is graduated*, calibrated to the actual light each person received and to the actual response each person made to it. *Not uniform. Not arbitrary. Just.*

Listen to John 5:

> Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live . . . Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth: those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:25, 28–29)

All who are in the graves will hear His voice. Not some. All. That is what Jesus is announcing. There will be no person (past, present, or future) who is not included in the moment when the voice of the Son of God reaches into the grave and pulls the dead forth. The Jesus we serve has cosmic reach, and that reach extends to every grave in every century. No one is forgotten. No one is excluded from the moment of the call.

And the response of those raised is described as two outcomes, resurrection of life or resurrection of condemnation. But notice what the text does not say. It does not say that the two outcomes are uniform in their severity. And the broader teaching of Jesus elsewhere makes it explicit that the assessment is graduated:

"But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" (Matthew 10:15).

More tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities that the prophet Isaiah had described as receiving permanent burning judgment (*the smoke would rise from them forever*, Isaiah 34:9–10, describing related judgment imagery) are now reframed by Jesus as receiving *a more lenient assessment* in the day of judgment than the cities that heard the gospel from his own disciples and rejected it. *The categories of permanent loss that the Old Testament had used for those notorious cities are being qualified by the One who has the final word on cosmic assessment*. *More tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the city that turned away the apostles* is one of the most pastorally generous statements in the entire Gospels, and it tells us something substantive about how the cosmic assessment actually works.

And someone might object, what about Isaiah 26:14?

"They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (Isaiah 26:14).

Other lords beside You have ruled over us, but they are dead, they will not rise. The prophet Isaiah declares that certain rulers will not rise. I love Isaiah. He is my favorite Old Testament prophet. And I am not going to wrangle with him on this. But what I will note is that the prophet's categories were not Jesus's final categories. Abraham was told that the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah would be permanent, smoke rising from the ground forever. And Jesus comes along centuries later and says: well, Abraham might have gotten that one a bit wrong. Because in the resurrection, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for this generation.

All I am saying is that we have come into contact with a God who is way beyond gracious. He is beyond anything we can imagine when it comes to love and mercy and grace and wooing. He is going to pull people with his great love right out of the grave. And he is going to cause them to ask: who are you? And the answer will come back: I am Jesus, whom you crucified. I am Jesus, whom you denied. I am Jesus, whom you never knew. Welcome home, my brother. And the offer will be extended to every person who has ever lived. Whether they take the offer is another question; that is the just dimension of the assessment. But the offer will be extended. Everyone will have the chance to say: I'm in. I'm on the Jesus train. Let's do this thing.

The Universal Jesus

And I do not know exactly how this all works out. I do not know the precise eschatological mechanism. It gets foggier the farther out we look. Ten thousand generations from now, I imagine we will still be peering out into the fog. Maybe a hundred thousand years from now. Maybe seven hundred billion years from now. Maybe we are a multi-planetary species by then. I do not know. Let us get weird. But what I am confident of is that there is a universal Jesus reigning over all things. He is over principalities and powers. He is over every high thing. He is over all the cosmos. There is no power above him. When the ancients thought the stars were demons and powers and forces affecting their lives, Paul says he is above all principalities and powers and the things working in dark places (Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16). And he says, you were once under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now working in the children of disobedience. But now, by the grace of God, you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1–8).

You are now his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). That is our identity now. We have taken on his identity. We move in his pattern. We extend his love into the world he is in the process of pulling out of the grave.

Listen to My Son

And let me close with one final image. *The Mount of Transfiguration.* Listen to what happened there:

> Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:1–5)

Hear Him. That is the Father's instruction from the cloud. Hear Him. The prophets were great. Moses was amazing: He had led Israel out of Egypt, delivered the Law, parted the sea, brought water from rocks, and shone with such glory after meeting with God that he had to put a veil over his face. Elijah was amazing: He had called down fire from heaven, raised the widow's son, defeated the prophets of Baal, been taken up in a chariot of fire. These men were not insignificant. They had done great things at moments when great things had needed to be done.

But now God speaks from the cloud and says: I am speaking through My Son. Listen to Him. The prophets are not the final word. The Son is the final word. And of that Son (of whom

we are members in particular, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 12:27)) we are the body. We are the blood. We are the bread. Break yourself. Pour yourself out. And let us see what God will do in our communities when we begin to live that way.

God has called us to do things we have no idea we are doing. Every act of sacrificial love we offer becomes part of the cosmic grenade-absorption that Christ inaugurated on the cross. Every prayer we pray for the unbelieving in our families (whether children, parents, grandchildren, or friends across oceans) becomes part of the harvest the Son is gathering. Every conversation we have with a friend in the Netherlands who is grieving over a seven-year-old with cancer becomes part of the message of the universal Jesus who pulls people out of the grave. Every small green fish that turns and swims in the opposite direction becomes the seed of a movement the surrounding gray school cannot see and cannot stop.

That is the resurrection life we have been called to live. It is the life of the One who jumped on the cosmic grenade so that we could survive its blast. And we who have survived because of him are now invited to take his identity, walk in his pattern, and extend his sacrificial love into the lives of everyone we encounter. That is what Easter means. That is what we are. And the fog is going to clear, generation by generation, until the universal Jesus has gathered every grave's voice into the song of new creation he is even now teaching the innumerable multitude to sing.