

The Second Sunday in Easter
April (14 &) 15, 2007
Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

I'm a reader. I love a good story. I especially like science fiction, and I have to say that a science fiction story has helped me understand this scene in John's Gospel, when Jesus appears instantly, despite locked doors, to the disciples. The science fiction story that did it for me was the four-volume *Hyperion* tale by Dan Simmons. The books move in chronological order, but there are characters who show up in the wrong places chronologically. There's the deadly, mysterious Shrike who pops into existence with little or no warning. It was built at the end of time and has been sent back from the future for purposes no one understands. There's Het Masteen, a monk of sorts who mysteriously vanishes partway through book one and reappears even more mysteriously late in book two speaking babble right before he dies. Late in book *four*, set hundreds of years later, we find out where, or rather *when*, he went. There's Aenea, who appears after having died. That's what makes these *Hyperion* books the perfect match. The resurrection comes to all of us at the end of time. Nonetheless, Christ has been raised from the dead and he appears to his disciples. Resurrected, he is no longer bound by time and space. He can be anywhere or 'anywhen' he wants.

The Risen Christ collapses time. He collapses the future back into the present. Think of time as a piece of string, stretched out. At one end is the creation; at the other end is the resurrection. We are *somewhere* on that string. The resurrection of Christ collapses that string and bunches it up so that the

resurrection is happening now. Or think of a radio antenna. Extended, the tip is a couple of feet from the radio. Collapsed, everything is bunched up. The parts overlap. That's what the resurrection does. Things get bunched up. It gets hard to differentiate the beginning and the end, so much that there is just one, the beginning *and* the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, Jesus the Christ.

It is a pretty neat trick that Jesus can do, showing up resurrected wherever and whenever he pleases. If St John is trustworthy, Jesus is absolutely mischievous with its application. The disciples are locked away for fear of the Judean authorities who killed Jesus. Jesus knows this. So, without any warning—no visual cues, no knock at the door or loud voice from heaven—Jesus appears and says, “Peace be with you.” That’s quite a jolt to someone who has the jitters! Jesus then assures them, “No, really, it’s I, Jesus, your buddy. Here are my hands. See the holes! Here’s the big one in my side, look! Hand goes in; hand goes out.” He’s playing around with his friends. That tells us something about him. A man who does this absolutely loves his disciples. He wants to have a good laugh with his friends. He wants that intimate—not sexual, but intimate, very, very close—relationship with his friends. He comes back from the dead seeking the people he loves. That, Friends of Christ, is the love of God in Christ Jesus. That is what the Risen Christ brings us. This tender, humorous moment is the kind of thing that can sustain a person when all else looks bleak.

The Risen Christ gives us hope that the resurrection is our future. The Risen Christ is foreshadowing for our life story. In a good story—science fiction or not—there’s usually some foreshadowing, some indication of what awaits the reader. It’s the kind of thing that keeps us reading. A classic example of foreshadowing is at the beginning of Charles Dickens’ novel, *Great Expectations*, when the little boy Pip helps feed Magwitch, a mysterious escaped convict. Years later, Pip learns that he has a mysterious benefactor who is paying for him to move to London and learn to become a gentleman. He is convinced all along that it is his etiquette teacher, Miss Havisham, who has chosen him to be a husband for her gorgeous daughter, Estella, and he is *so* convinced that we readers get convinced along with him. The opening scene controls the whole story and foreshadows the moment when we learn with Pip that Magwitch, the escaped convict, is the mysterious benefactor, helping Pip in gratitude for Pip’s help.

The resurrection likewise foreshadows our ending. It controls the direction of our life story. The world can wear us down into despair. It can convince us that this life is brutal and painful and that death is the only end in sight. It can make us want to escape this world, to ignore the ones who love us, and fly away into our own private world. It can make us live only for the greatest possible gain right now and damn the consequences. The resurrection is the foreshadowing that reminds us that God loves us and is with us and that while each of us will face death God will take us out of death and into life. The resurrection keeps us reading—keeps us living—our life story.

The resurrection also is hope *fulfilled* in the present. It is the ending of the story, but it echoes backward through the story. The resurrection is an echo of our future. Little resurrections pop up everywhere. In the Creation God breathes the spirit into the first humans, making life out of dust. In that room behind the locked doors, Christ breathes the spirit into the apostles, making believers out of those who moments ago despaired. Out of death and despair God makes life and hope. In *Great Expectations*, Pip at first is horrified and crestfallen to learn that Magwitch was his benefactor. As he gets to know him he gets over his unfulfilled expectations and forms a friendship with Magwitch. Little resurrections crop up like that in everyday life, not just in stories. Every time an estranged child and parent reunite that's an echo of the resurrection. Every time a dying person comes to peace with God, that is a resurrection. Every time a person finds healing from an illness or injury, that is a resurrection. Every time a person's life gets turned around by the grace of God that is a resurrection.

Three splashes of water over the head in Holy Baptism are a foreshadowing of our death and resurrection, a sacrament sent hurtling back from the end of time and into the present to give us hope. A piece of bread and a drink of wine in Holy Communion are a foreshadowing of the joy of resurrection life, a sacrament sent back from God's victory party *beyond* the end of time, and into the present to give us hope. Time collapses, the beginning and the end are happening simultaneously for us in he who is the beginning and the end, Jesus the Christ.

Filled with the hope of the resurrection, the resurrection now and the resurrection to come, we read on. We keep going. Though the world will try to convince us that there is no hope, the foreshadowing of the resurrection controls our story. It gives away the ending. We don't know how we'll get there. We can't really describe what it will be like when we do get there. All along the way, the risen Christ comes hurtling back through time at us, raising us to new life, and bringing us through this story's convoluted plot until we, like Christ, are risen indeed. Amen