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Reflection on the Resurrection

Mark 16:1-8

by Alan Misson

Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.

What I want to do in this reflection on the Resurrection is to express as best as I am able my understanding of something of what the Word and the Writings teach us on this vitally important yet miraculous and complex subject. I make this point because I may well see it differently to others who are working from the same teachings but it nevertheless represents the understanding I have reached at this point in my life.

Mark has Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome coming to the tomb and finding no body. Matthew tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb and find no body. Luke is not specific about the names of the women who enter the tomb and find no body but later refers to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and

Joanna as the women who tell the disciples what has happened. John also has Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb but shortly followed by John and Peter who all find no body.

We can be left in no doubt then that the first key message of the Resurrection story is that despite the body of Jesus being laid to rest in a tomb late on the day of crucifixion there is no body of Jesus when his followers come to the tomb on what we know as Easter Sunday.

Further, Matthew's gospel adds a paragraph about the chief priests bribing the soldiers who had been on guard and saying to them: *Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep'*. Today we would probably class these comments as 'fake' news and certainly we must not allow ourselves to be drawn away towards this sort of false thinking. There was no body, no human body, no body of Jesus of Nazareth! We need to take this as a fact if we are to move forward in our understanding of the Resurrection.

Later, after the initial visits to the tomb, Jesus appears in a number of ways to his followers and disciples. John has Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene who doesn't recognise him and thinks he is the gardener. Later John has Jesus coming to Galilee and talking with Peter who doesn't recognise him. Luke has the lovely story of two disciples walking to Emmaus and Jesus joins them but he is not recognised. We ought to ask ourselves – Why isn't Jesus recognised? After all he had been with them for three very busy years and they would have experienced his presence in all sorts of very different situations. It is impossible to imagine that after this level of personal contact that they would not have recognised him anywhere! And yet they didn't. To borrow from Mark's words – they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth but he wasn't there. They didn't recognise the Risen Lord because they still expected to see the man, born to Mary, who grew up and lived in Nazareth for some 30 years. But the gospels are showing us that this man no longer existed.

I will come back to this thought a little later. Meanwhile I want to include some New Church Teaching on the subject of the Lord's Glorification. Consider these two quotations:

True Christianity 126

There are two things for which the Lord came into the world and through which he saved people and angels: redemption, and the glorification of his human aspect. These two things are distinct from each other, but they become one in contributing to salvation.

In the preceding points we have shown what redemption was: battling the hells, gaining control over them, and then restructuring the heavens. Glorification, however, was the uniting of the Lord's human nature with the divine nature of his Father. This process occurred in successive stages and was completed by the suffering on the cross.

Doctrine of the Lord 35

Step by step he took off the human nature he had taken on from his mother and put on a human nature from what was divine within him, which is the divine human nature and the Son of God. It is generally known that the Lord was divine and human, divine because of Jehovah the Father and human because of the Virgin Mary. That is why he was God and a human being and therefore had a divine essence and a human outward nature, the divine essence from his Father and the human nature from his mother. This meant that he was equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, but less than the Father with respect to his humanity. It also meant that this human nature from his mother was not changed into or mixed with a divine essence, since a human nature cannot be changed into or mixed with a divine essence.

God came into our world as the Divine Truth in the finite human personality and consciousness of Jesus. This personality inherited from Mary a very human propensity towards evil and false approaches to life and in these Jesus was tempted just like us, but without sin. This man, this Jesus of Nazareth, was finite, he was born in time, he lived and suffered in time and was tempted in time. And at his death he died in time. And after his death this human outward nature, known to all around him as Jesus of Nazareth, ceased to exist – its consciousness, its infirmity, its space and time, its finite restriction – all ceased to exist. But in its place there was now a Divine Human nature – a Divine Humanity.

Way back in 1773, shortly after *True Christianity* had been first published in London by Emanuel Swedenborg, Rev John Clowes MA, the Rector of St John's Manchester, was persuaded by a friend to purchase a copy of the book from London. On his first reading he came across the term *Divinum Humanum* and later when reflecting on it was profoundly affected by the glory it presented to him. So much so that, despite remaining an Anglican clergyman, he dedicated the rest of his life to translating and making better known the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The Divine Humanity is the personality of our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the full embodiment and manifestation of the unknowable and unapproachable Divine Itself – the I AM. In the Divine Humanity we can know God person to person because the Divine Humanity provides the bridge that spans the gap between finite humankind and infinite God and as such is the only way to the Father.

Arcana Caelestia 1990:2 puts it this way:

The Infinite itself which stands above all the heavens and above man's inmost being cannot be manifested except by means of the Divine Human, which exists solely with the Lord. Communication of the Infinite with finite beings is not possible at all from any other source. This also explains why, when Jehovah appeared to members of the Most Ancient Church and subsequently to members of the Ancient Church which existed after the Flood, and also after that to Abraham and the prophets, He was manifested to them as a human being. That it was indeed the Lord, He Himself openly teaches in John,

Abraham your father rejoiced to see My day, and saw it and was glad. Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. John 8:56, 58.

When we approach the Risen Lord Jesus Christ in his Divine Humanity he comes to each one of us in the way each one of us needs, adapting and accommodating himself to our particular ability to receive him and our particular understanding of who he is. There is infinite variety in the people God creates and therefore infinite variety in the ways in which people can come to know God as a Person in his Divine Humanity.

When we immerse ourselves in the literal sense of the Gospels we come to know the man Jesus of Nazareth just as his followers knew him and we can discuss what his personality may have been like and what he looked like and what made him different to others. And we would all have a substantially common view of whom we were discussing. But with the Resurrection all that changed as can be seen by the inability of Jesus' followers to recognise him.

Now, because of the Resurrection, all people can experience a personal relationship with a Personal God and find great comfort, confidence and encouragement in such a relationship. Some, like Thomas, may come to know the Divine Humanity in a very down to earth physical way because that is what works for them. Others may come to know the Divine Humanity as a friend who walks alongside them through life, as on the road to Emmaus. And there will also be those who recognise the Divine Humanity in the breaking of bread – the experience of sharing goodness and love with others. In these and a myriad of other ways people can know a personal God with whom they can relate and form a unique mutual bond.

This Easter let us give thanks to the Lord for his great work of Redemption and Glorification which enables all people freely to come to know a Personal God in an infinite variety of unique ways that works perfectly for each person.