

A.B. Simpson:

“He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Easter morning is the beginning of a unique and most tenderly interesting portion of our blessed Savior's life. It is the transition period between His earthly ministry and His heavenly exaltation. Like the Indian summer of the year, there is a tender veil of loveliness and mystery about it which links it with both worlds, and makes it a peculiarly appropriate pattern of a life hid with Christ in God, in which we may walk with Him all our days with our heads in heaven while our feet still tread the earth below. May the Holy Spirit vividly reveal to us such glimpses of this blessed life as will enable us to reproduce it in our own experience and to walk with Him with a new sense of His abiding presence and glorious reality!

A Living Christ

This glad resurrection morning dispels from the religion of Jesus all the shadows of the sepulcher and all the morbid atmosphere of sorrow, depression and death. The Christ of true Christianity is not a bleeding, thorn crowned Ecce Homo, but a glad and radiant face, bright as the spring tide morning and radiant with immortal life. "I am he that liveth, and was dead," is His message, and "Behold! I am alive for ever more." Oh, may this day impress upon our hearts the reality of a Risen and Living Christ, until He shall be more actual to us than any other personality and we shall know what it means to be not only "reconciled to God by the death of His Son" but "much more we shall be saved by his life"!

A Victorious Christ

What a picture of easy and uttermost triumph is that resurrection scene! Satan had done his utmost; men had done their best to hold the Captive of the tomb. But without an effort the Mighty Sleeper calmly rose before the Easter dawn, deliberately laying off the grave clothes and wrapping up the napkin and putting all in place as naturally as any of us this morning arranged our toilet; and then through that colossal stone that closed His tomb, He passed without even rolling it aside or breaking the seal, and before the guards could know that He was risen, He was standing calmly in the garden, talking with Mary as though nothing had happened. The infinite facility with which He put His feet on every foe and rose above every obstacle is, perhaps, the most overwhelming impression we have received from all the incidents of His resurrection.

So, too, we see the same victorious power expressed in the attitude of the angel who followed Him, and with a single touch rolled away the stone from the sepulcher and coolly sat down upon it, and then looked in the faces of the keepers till they grew pale with terror and flew in horror and dismay without a struggle.

Such is our Risen Christ still, the Mighty Victor over all His foes and ours. Could we see Him now, we would behold Him sitting on His Father's throne, undismayed by all the powers of darkness, and "from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." Oh, how it cheers our timid hearts to behold our glorious and victorious Captain, and to hear Him say of every adversary and every difficulty, "I have overcome for you." God help us to see the Captain as Joshua beheld Him, and before Him the walls of every Jericho will fall and the legions of every opposing force shall melt away!

How natural, how easy, how artless His manifestations were through those blessed forty days! How quietly He dropped down among them, unheralded, unassuming, unattended by angelic guards, and sometimes undistinguished from themselves in His simple presence! Look at Him as He meets with Mary in that first morning interview, standing like an ordinary stranger in the garden, speaking to her in easy conversation, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" And then, when the moment for recognition comes, He speaks to her heart in the one artless word of personal and unutterable love which disarmed all her amazement and fear, and brought back all the old recollections and affections of her throbbing heart! See Him again on the way to Emmaus! How naturally He drops in upon the little company as they walk! How unaffectedly He talks with them! How easily He turns the conversation to heavenly themes, and yet how free from strain His every attitude and word! All they are conscious of, is a strange burning in their hearts and a kindling warmth of love. At length they constrain Him and He allows Himself to be pressed to enter in. He sits down by their table, He eats bread, as if He had been another disciple like themselves; and only then, as He vanishes quietly from their sight, do they realize that it is the Lord.

And yet again, on the shores of Tiberias, how exquisite is His approach! How natural His greeting; how easy the

mighty miracle of the draught of fishes; how calm and unaffected are the meeting as they reach the shore and the simple breakfast in which He Himself takes part. How exquisite the interview with Simon Peter, the delicacy and tenderness of which no word can ever express! On, what a picture of that Blessed One who still lives to be our constant Visitor, our ceaseless Companion and Friend; Who meets us like Mary in our hours of sorrow; Who walks with us, as with them, often unrecognized at first; Who greets us in the cold, sad morning after our long hours of waiting and toil and failure with His marvelous deliverance and yet more gracious words of love and instruction. So near is He that not even our nearest friends can come so close! So simple is He that His messages come as the intuition of our own hearts; and yet He is the wonderful Counselor and the mighty God for all our perplexities and all our hard places. Blessed Christ of the Forty Days, oh, help us, with a faith more simple and a love more childlike to walk with Thee!

The Mighty Christ

It is hard for us to realize the Presence that comes with such gentle footsteps and undemonstrative simplicity; but back of that gentle form and those noiseless steps is the Omnipotence that could say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." All power is His in heaven. He is the Lamb in the midst of the Throne, that holds in His hand the seven seals and unrolls the scroll of destiny and providence for all worlds and beings and events. All the mighty acts of God recorded in the Old Testament were but manifestations of His power. All the mighty movements which began with His ascension are the workings of His hands. All the movements of Divine providence are subject to His command. All the mighty angels of heaven's myriad hosts are subject to His bidding. All the powers of hell tremble at His name! All the promises of God are fulfilled with His endorsement. All the laws of nature are subject to His mandates. And all power on earth is subordinate to His power. Not a wind can blow without His permission, not a disease can strike but as He allows, not a human hand can hurt us while He shields us with His presence. The circumstances of life, the enemies of our souls and the infirmities of our bodies are subject to His Word. The very thrones of earth are subordinate to His authority. He can make a Cyrus send back the tribes of Israel by a national decree. He can make a Constantine behold the flaming Cross upon the sky and become a follower of the Heavenly Standard. He can open nations and kingdoms to the Gospel, and so He bids us go forth and disciple all the nations because of His Almighty power in our behalf! Ho mighty was the power of the resurrection! It surmounted the power of death and the grave; it passed through the solid stone; it defied the stamp of the Roman government and the sentinels of the Roman army. It could pass through the closed doors without rending them asunder. It could bring the miraculous draught of fishes to the apostle's net with a single word of command. It could rise without an effort in the chariot of His ascension. It could anoint those weak and timid men with the power that shook the world and laid the foundations of the Church. Oh, that our eyes were but opened that we might behold "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," and "the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:18-23). Why is it that we do not receive and realize more of this Almighty Christ? Alas! because we cannot understand or stand the fullness of His power. God is ready to work through us the triumphs of His omnipotence, but we must be fitted vessels, open to His touch and able to stand His power. The ordinance that has to bear a mighty charge of powder must be heavy enough to stand the charge without explosion. And so hearts that are to know the power of Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, must be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man," so that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." To think of what Christ is ready and willing to do in us and for us would frighten some of us into apoplexy, and actually to realize it would snap the frail thread of life itself. Christ's heart is bursting with resources that the world needs and that He is ready to use if only He could find vessels ready and willing to use them. Oh, that we had the courage to see the power which He is waiting to place at the service of all who are consecrated enough to use it for His glory and close enough to receive the heavenly baptism! He has for us the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, the power that will conquer circumstances and control all events for His will, and the power that will make us the trophies of His grace and the monuments of His indwelling presence and victory. We shall find this power as we go forth to use it according to His own commission, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." Nothing but a work as wide as the world can ever make room for the power which Christ is waiting to bestow.

A Loving Christ

How unavailing all His power would be if we were not sure that it is available for us, and that His heart as tenderly loves us as His mighty hand can help us. How tender and loving the Christ of the Forty Days! See Him in the garden as He speaks to Mary with tender sympathy: "Women, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" He asks, and then calls her by her name in tones which must have expressed more than words could tell. What

mourner can doubt henceforth His sympathy and love? What heart can hesitate to accept His friendship which still speaks to each of us with as direct and personal a call, and gives to each a name of special and affectionate regard?

Or look again at Him as He meets with Thomas, the doubting one, the willful disciple that petulantly demanded that the Lord should meet him with an evidence that He had given to none other, and that no human heart had a right imperiously to claim. But how tenderly the Lord concedes even his demand, until Thomas is ashamed to accept it and, more amazed at his Lord's magnanimity and omniscience than the evidence of His wounds, he cries, "My Lord and my God." Who that is harassed with doubts and difficulties need fear again to bring them to His presence, Who with such condescending love is ready to meet them all, and to make our hearts know by the deeper evidence of His own great love and the revealing of Himself that He is indeed the Son of God?

And look at His interview with Simon Peter! What backslider need ever doubt again the Savior's forgiving love, or fear to come and know that he will be welcomed to a nearer place in His heart and a higher service in His kingdom if only he can say as Simon said, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

So tender, so forgiving, so full of love He comes to us, to dry our tears, to satisfy our doubts, to forgive our failures, to restore our souls, and then to use us for a higher service, just because we have learned through our own infirmities the depths of His great love. The secret of walking closely with Christ and working successfully for Him, is to fully realize that we are His beloved. Let us but feel that He has set His heart upon us, that He is watching us from those heavens with the same tender interest that He felt for Simon and Mary, that He is working out the mystery of our lives with the same solicitude and fondness, that He is following us day by day as any mother follows her babe in his first attempt to walk alone, that He has set His love upon us, and, in spite of ourselves, is working out for us His highest will and blessing, as far as we will let Him; and then nothing can discourage us. Our hearts will glow with responsive love. Our faith will spring to meet His mighty promises, and our sacrifices shall become the very luxuries of love for one so dear. This was the secret of John's spirit. "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." And the heart that has fully learned this has found the secret of unbounded faith and enthusiastic service.

The Physical Christ

He that came forth from Joseph's tomb came forth in the flesh, with a material body and the same form that He had laid down in death and the grave. He made this most emphatic in His interview with His disciples after His resurrection. He wished them to be thoroughly assured that there was no illusion about His body. "Handle me, and see," was His emphatic word, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

Indeed, His spiritual consciousness had not died; it was only His body that tasted death, and it was His body therefore that was raised from death. The resurrection of Christ, then, is a physical fact, and the physical meaning of the resurrection must be of surpassing importance. It means no less than this, that He has come forth to be the physical life of His people now, and in a little while the Fountain of their immortality and the Head of their resurrection bodies.

What a source of strength and inspiration it is for us to know that our blessed Lord has still the same physical organization that we possess, and is willing and able to share with these mortal frames His infinite and quickening life! He is our living Bread, and as He lived by the Father, so we may live by Him, and not only is He the source of health and strength to our material life, but He cares for the wants of the body. Hungry and cold were the disciples from their fruitless fishing that Galilean morning; He saw their need and tenderly asked them, "Children, have ye any meat?" and then, filling their empty nets and spreading the table on the shore, He said, "Come and dine." So still He thinks of the poor and the struggling, the hungry and the helpless ones, and stands beside them in their need, ready and able, by a word, to provide immediate and abundant supply.

Are we today in any place of need? The Christ of the Forty Days is nearer than we think, able to be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and ready to give us the greatest help in time of need. Like the fishers of that Galilean sea, our empty nets can be filled at His bidding; the perplexed workman can be directed to the very thing to do; the wretched failure can be all corrected. There is no need that He cannot supply, no counsel that He is not able to give, no regions where His power does not penetrate, no disciple that He does not love to help in every time of need. Oh, let us trust Him more with all our circumstances and sorrows, and our utmost need will only prove the more infinite resources of His love and grace.

The Ever-Present Christ

The Christ of the Forty Days is not a transient vision that has passed away forever, but the Christ of all the ages. Standing at the close of those blessed days midway between earth and heaven, He said, "Lo! I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." That blessed present tense has bridged the past and the present, and has prolonged those heavenly days after the resurrection through all the days since then, It is not "I will be," as one who has to go away and come back again; but "I am," as a presence that is never to be withdrawn, He is unseen, it is true, but is as real as any friend is real in his absence as well as presence. For in the spiritual world distance and time are eliminated; just as the telescope can bring the distant object near the eye, and the telephone can present the voice that is hundreds of miles away to the listening and attentive ear, so there is a spiritual mechanism that can make Christ as immediate to the heart as though He were still visibly by our side. Had we but another sense, all heavenly beings and realities would be directly present to our perception.

The promise of this beautiful passage is not only fulfilled in the presence of Christ in the heart of the believer, which is a literal and glorious truth, but it is a presence with us. It is more than the spiritual consciousness of the Lord's indwelling. It is His direct personality and constant companionship with all our life and His omnipotent cooperation in all our needs. It is the presence of One who has all power in heaven and in earth, and whose presence means the defeat of every adversary, the solution of every difficulty, the supply of every need. Oh, it does seem, in these days, as though we could almost see Him moving in the midst of His people, here and there, in His mighty working, on the mission field with the lone worker in the midst of dangers and foes, in the busy streets of the crowded city, in the mingled incidents of business life, in the whirl and confusion of our intense life today, in every department of human society -- touching with His hands all the chords of influence and power, moving the wheels of Providence, and working out His purpose for His people and the redemption of the world. Oh, that we might see Him as Joshua saw the Captain when He entered Canaan and camped around Jericho; as Stephen saw Him when he faced the crowd of wolfish foes that thirsted for his blood; as Paul saw Him amid the tempests of the Adriatic and the lions of the Coliseum; as John saw Him in the midst of the Throne, holding in His hand the seven stars and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and then standing before the Throne with all the seals of human destiny in His own right hand! Then, indeed, no trial could discourage us, no foe intimidate us, no fear dismay us, no work overwhelm us; for above every voice of peril or of hostile power, we would hear His gentle whisper, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age."

The promise is better translated "all the days," rather than "always." He comes to you each day with a new blessing. Every morning, day by day, He walks with us, with a love that never tires and a blessing that never grows old. And He is with us "all the days"; it is a ceaseless abiding. There is no day so dark, so commonplace, so uninteresting, but you find Him there. Often, no doubt, He is unrecognized, as He was on the way to Emmaus, until you realize how your heart has been warmed, your love stirred and your Bible so strangely vivified that every promise seems to speak to you with heavenly reality and power. It was the Lord! God grant that His living presence may be made more and more real to us all henceforth, and whether we have the consciousness and evidence, as they had a few glorious times those forty days, or whether we go forth into the coming days, as they did most of their days, to walk by simple faith and in simple duty, let us know, at least, that the fact is true forevermore, that He is with us, a presence all unseen but real, and ready if we need Him any moment to manifest Himself for our relief.

There is a beautiful incident related of the mother of an English schoolboy whom, when he was a lad, she sent to a boarding school, some distance from her home, where the rules of the school only permitted her to visit once a fortnight. But this was more than her mother heart could stand, and so, all unknown to her boy or his teachers, she rented a little attic overlooking the school, and often, when he little dreamed, she would sit in that upper room with her eyes on her darling boy as he played in that yard below or studied in the schoolroom. He could not see her, nor did he dream that she was there, but had he cried or called her name or needed her for a moment, he was within her reach.

The is a little parable of the sleepless love and the ceaseless oversight which our savior exercises towards His beloved ones, for He has His eye upon us by day and by night; and although we do not see His face and hands and form as He moves through our pathway, dissipating our foes and clearing our way, yet He is there, ever there "all the days, even unto the end." Let us believe His promise, let us assume the reality of His presence, let us recognize Him as ever near, let us speak to Him as one ever by our side, and He shall ever answer us, either by the whispers of His love or by the workings of His hand.

Thus shall we never be alone, thus shall we never be defenseless, thus shall we never be defeated, thus need we never fear. And even should the lonely vale itself open to us, it shall be but the opening vista of a larger vision and a closer and nearer presence, as we find that neither "death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,

(Cross of Christ) 10. AFTER-EASTER-DAYS

nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39)