

Eclipse Our Doubt with Love  
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April 7, 2024

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What a week it has been for northern New Jersey! I had been preparing for the eclipse and planned our scripture readings around it. But I had not expected that in the days before, a storm would tear through our neighborhoods, uprooting trees and snapping power lines, or that an earthquake would rumble up and down the East Coast, with aftershocks following.

I suppose it is appropriate, though, that the land we know participates in something as unsettling as the earth shifting and the sun hiding to mark this season of resurrection. Just as an earthquake tells us that tectonic plates have shifted, the empty tomb tells us that our stories that end in death and destruction have shifted. Death has lost its power over us. It is astonishing news that warrants amazing things happening in order to echo its importance.

Some of us need amazement, don't we, in order to be swept off our feet. Think of all the tourists who will be traveling hundreds of miles, just so they will be in the path of totality for the solar eclipse. It's an event that lasts just over 4 minutes. What's the big deal, really? Four minutes, and then you are done with the awe and wonder and have to face the traffic going home. Four minutes, and you return to being the same person you always were. Still, interviews record people telling of their memories of an eclipse years ago. They remember it, as if the sun— or its darkness— seared an imprint in their brains. I suppose it is a feeling of being part of a cosmic rhythm that reminds you that you belong to something *vastly* bigger than yourself and what you know. I will be with my family in Cleveland tomorrow, and I am curious as to what it may feel like for my body: to be sandwiched between the earth and the moon while the moon completely blocks the sun.

English mystic Julian of Norwich understood clearly the cosmic nature of the crucifixion event when she wrote: "The sky and the earth failed at the time of Christ's dying because he too was part of nature."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, "Crucifixion and the Cosmic Christ." *Daily Meditations with Matthew Fox*, April 2, 2021

Just before our last Gospel passage from this morning begins, Mary Magdalene had run to tell the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” and explained to them the story of Jesus’ resurrection appearance to her. But instead of throwing a festive parade, or going out to find Jesus, or offering prayers of wonder and praise at the Temple, the disciples are hiding out in a house, with the doors locked. John says they were afraid of the Jews, and let me explain, because some historical interpretations of John’s gospel have led Christians to antisemitic assumptions. *All* of these disciples *were* Jews. So was Jesus. They all belonged to the same family of faith. But they were afraid of religious authorities, from within their own community.

What an amazement it must have been for them, to witness Jesus— not knocking at the door, or throwing a pebble at their window, but just showing up, suddenly there in their midst, saying “Peace be with you. As the Father sends me, so I send you.”

And then, a breath! Jesus breathed on them, and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Tied to that gift of the Holy Spirit was this instruction: “Forgive the sins of others, and they will be forgiven. Retain the sins of any, and they will be retained.”

It is as if sin has some kind of cosmic power beyond its act, and the disciples have been given the ability to make it go away, or foster it. I think that means we have that power, too.

When news of the resurrection of Christ hit Thomas the disciple, like those who insist on traveling to place themselves in the path of totality for the eclipse, Thomas knew he had to see it for himself. Not only that, Thomas wanted to touch Jesus, to feel his wounds.

It is interesting, isn’t it, that the resurrected Christ isn’t just fixed, good as new. He still bears the marks of a wounded body. Maybe there is something about that woundedness that allowed Thomas to see his own wounded reflection on Jesus, and be healed.

Resurrection means *to stand again*. It isn’t just Jesus who experienced a resurrection on that Sunday. In a sense, his whole community did, too. Mary Magdalene first, and then the rest of the disciples, with Thomas trailing behind,

moved from a place of inward-focused, what-does-this-mean-for-me kind of locked-up fear, to an outward-focused, liberated witness.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, the resurrected Jesus eclipsed their doubt— first with his actual body, and then with his loving words and breath, as he breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, and offered them peace.

The sun shone brightly on Good Friday, ten days ago, as one of our parishioners climbed the stairs into the Episcopal church for an ecumenical service to remember Jesus' passion and crucifixion. As she reached for the bulletin the person at the top of the stone steps was handing her, she lost her balance and tumbled down the stairs, flat onto the sidewalk where she stayed. She was helped immediately by those who saw her fall, and held her head and neck still and gently urged her to let them call an ambulance. She was okay, because she's Anne, who at 92 is spry in ways some of the others in our church, though younger than Anne, might envy. Anne was busy chatting with the neighbors helping her, and noticing who was the adult child of someone she had known many years back. So, we knew she was probably going to be fine. Still, better safe than sorry. When the paramedics arrived, the initial care team shifted to make room for the professionals. As the paramedics examined Anne, Anne's eyes started to flutter and close and her chatter ceased. The paramedics became quickly concerned. But I realized that the woman who had earlier been shading Anne from that bright sun had moved, and so the sun was shining right into Anne's face. I told the paramedic to move her body to block the sun again, which she did, and sure enough, Anne opened her eyes and returned to her friendly chatter from the sidewalk in front of All Saints.

Jesus is like that. With his body and with his love, he eclipses the glare of our fears and our doubts. With his body, he makes sure we are not alone. With his body, he does not leave us flat on the sidewalk. Even though we will one day die, Christ causes us, with him, to stand again: in this life, in the life to come, and along with all of creation within which God so generously placed us.

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<sup>2</sup> Salt Lectionary for April 7, 2024