

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“A Resurrection Imagination”
John 20:1-18
Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018

There was a news headline that caught my attention this week. I don't know if you saw it. The Washington Post puts it this way: “An amateur rocket-maker finally launched himself off Earth... to prove it is flat.” It's hard to believe, isn't it?

Apparently, Mike Hughes is a California man who is a self-taught rocket scientist...which means he's got to be pretty smart, right? Right?

But he's determined to prove that the world is flat as a pancake.

This is no April Fool's Day joke. This is legit. You can look it up for yourselves...
(Not now! I see you back there. Put those phones away.)

The whole story is pretty funny. It's hard to believe there are still people who believe the world is flat and are trying to prove it. But then again... it wasn't all that long ago in the history of the world... that people believed the earth was the very center of the universe... and everything else rotated around our little planet.

About 500 years ago Copernicus wrote a whole book trying to change that. It was about how the earth rotates around the sun, not the other way around, but his book was eventually banned and mocked by all kinds of folks.

The controversy continued way past his lifetime. Everyone knew he was wrong... And it wasn't just religious leaders. Even scientists simply couldn't see it.

Because when you have things ordered in your mind a certain way, it's hard to *imagine* them otherwise.

I've been thinking lately that this is what happens on Easter morning.

I mean, it's hard to know what to do with this resurrection story, isn't it? Because let's be honest, *we live in a flat world where dead is dead, the end of the story.* It's hard to imagine otherwise.

And that certainly was Mary Magdalene's world too. She goes to the tomb to care for Jesus' dead body and the first thing she finds is that the stone had been rolled away. That was pretty startling. She assumed some foul play was at work there. It was disturbing enough that she went back to get two of the other disciples.

So they come and check things out... and it's all so strange... and they leave not knowing what is going on... the whole scene is so fuzzy and mysterious...

But Mary... she's still there...standing outside the tomb, all the emotions of the weekend welling up in her. The deep pain. The deep loss. The graphic nature of it all. She's outside the tomb just weeping.

After the two disciples leave she bends over to look in the tomb herself... for the first time ... and she sees two angels in white where Jesus' body is supposed to be. But she doesn't really *see* it does she? She's living in a flat world.

They ask her why she's weeping. She tells them, "Somebody's taken his body... and... and I don't know where they've put him." And you could imagine she's thinking, "They've tortured him enough already, and now they've taken his body?"

She turns around and this time she sees the resurrected Jesus... standing right there, right in front of her. But she still can't see it. She thinks he's a stranger.

This time Jesus asks her, "Why are you weeping?"

Again she asks about what has happened to his dead body.

The whole scene would be kind of comical if it weren't so sad. You can't help but feel Mary's pain... and you can't help but see *how tragic it can be when our imaginations remain closed off*. Mary *can't see* that *what she longs for is standing there right in front of her eyes*.

She can't see it because she's living in a flat world... a static world that does not move.

Until... Jesus says her name.

I've often wondered about that.

What is it about hearing her name?

Is it the familiar way he says it?

You know, like the way your mom or your dad, or an intimate friend has a certain way of saying your name... and no one else does it quite like that?

And when you hear them say your name... it triggers certain kinds of emotions that no one else does?

It takes you places, opens you up, makes you defensive or playful in an instant.

Something shifts in you.

I think something similar happens here with Mary. It wasn't just her name. It was the way that *only Jesus* said her name... a way that opened her up in the most meaningful life-giving places.

When she hears it, "Mary... Mary..." something opens in her soul... something is awakened. Her *imagination* is suddenly thrown wide open and she sees what is standing right in front of her.

She sees... *who* is standing right in front of her.

It's a complete shift in her center of gravity.

Suddenly the world isn't a static unmoving center.

The world is circling around the Sun...

In a solar system that is swirling around a galaxy

a galaxy that is that is dancing with life...

inside a universe that is ever expanding and growing.

The whole thing is dizzying and disorienting...

The world is spinning!

Her imagination is being ripped wide open... and her world becomes full of new possibilities!

Well, if you know your science history then you know a few generations after Copernicus, a scientist named Galileo began to imagine what Copernicus was describing... and he set out to prove it.

And eventually more and more people began to imagine it too... and once their imagination had shifted, once their imagination was formed in a different way... there were *all kinds of scientific breakthroughs*. It fundamentally changed the nature of physics.

Because you see, when our imaginations expand, and shift, and open up to what we could not previously see... ***all kinds of new possibilities begin to emerge.***

This is what Easter does to us. It is an opening to see our world and our life in an entirely different way. Easter is an imaginative leap...

Not a leap from reality to fairytales...

But a leap from a static world to a dynamic world....

from a flat world with edges that drop into nothingness...

to a 3-dimensional globe... where there are no endings.

The resurrection of Jesus can awaken our eyes to see the world entirely differently... and to see our lives entirely differently... But that will only happen ***if we allow it to begin to re-shape our imaginations.*** [pause]

One of the great tragedies of adulthood is the tendency to shut down our imaginations. To get stuck in how we see things. That leads to all kinds of problems...

We get stuck in our political imaginations... and our rhetoric gets stuck... and the transformation that our communities long for never happens.

We get stuck in our workplaces imaginations, and the problems we face become like a series of dead-end roads with no alternative routes. No one can find a way around. A hopelessness grows and the whole thing derails the very momentum of the company you're working for.

That's what happens when your imagination gets stuck.

And it happens in our relationships too, doesn't it? In our most intimate relationships we get stuck in a repetitive and wearying pattern... sameness and conflict define our lives together... and we can't imagine something different... in our marriage. It just is what it is. Our imagination is stuck.

And sometimes that just happens in a person's individual life.

Something devastating happens to someone,

or some profound failure that draws them into judgment and shame.

And the rational mind spins in circles trying to find a way out... like a dog trapped in a cage... going round and round... chasing its tail.... the mind keeps spinning... never imagining the possibility of jumping over the cage it's in.

When our imaginations are shut down,

our world becomes static... and we get stuck.

That's why thriving companies look for leaders with imagination.

And healthy life-long relationships look for sources of creativity and imagination.

And those who have been devastated by loss or failure... need someone to call out their name in the most intimate way so that they can imagine something other than the cage they are trapped in.

Well Dayspring, ***Easter is calling your name.***

It's calling you and me to re-imagine all the dead ends of our lives. [pause]

When I was a kid I grew up on a dead end street. It wasn't one of those nice cul-de-sacs that you'd find in Chesterfield. It was more of an asphalt stretch that just sort of stopped three or four houses past mine.

No one traveled the street... There wasn't anything there worth noticing. Cars went back and forth on the main street at the bottom of the hill. In fact, there were a few little league ballparks down there... And a mile or so past our street was the elementary school.

But of course, no one went down our street... not unless you lived there. Because there was nothing there. Nothing past the last house. The road just stopped.

Or at least that's how most saw it.

But the end of the asphalt wasn't an ending at all for me and my brothers. It was the beginning. It was the doorway. Because at the end of the road there was a field... and there were these woods. And back in the woods there was a whole world of stories to enact,

and forts to build,

and adventure to have,

and places to explore.

If you had an imagination big enough to see it.

That's what a resurrection imagination does for us. As John O'Donohue puts it, a resurrection imagination helps us to see that *what we thought was a dead end, "now becomes **an urgent and exciting pathway**."*¹

In fact he says, "The imagination is like a lantern. It illuminates ...

When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us....

Too often we squander the invitations extended to us because our looking has become repetitive and blind. ***The mystery and beauty is all around us, but we never manage to see it.***"²

The mystery and beauty of Easter morning was all around Mary Magdalene, but she could not see it.

The stone was rolled away.

The angels in white were sitting in the tomb.

Even Jesus was standing before her,

but she could not manage to see it. At least not at first.

And so much of the time that is how you and I... live our lives.

"The mystery and beauty is all around us."

The Life of God is all around us. But we do not manage to see it.

So on this Easter morning let me invite you to stretch open your imagination and see that our world is teeming with possibilities.

What looks like a dead end may just be a doorway.

When your life, and your relationships, and your work feels static and stuck, and everything in your mind and heart seems to rotate around that one stuck place,

¹ John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 146.

² John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 145.

you probably aren't seeing the whole picture.

Stop chasing your tail long enough to listen for the One who is calling your name. Listen and see the world alive with the Resurrected Christ.

Gerald Manly Hopkins has this wonderful line in a poem where he's stirring our imagination to see that everything in our world is alive with the presence of God: fish and dragon flies, stones and wells, men and women, children and adults... all of it is alive with ***Presence***.

And near the end of his poem he writes, "Christ plays in 10 thousand places, lovely in eyes and lovely in limbs not his..." Christ plays in 10 thousand places. In everything you encounter...

So on this Easter morning, may your imagination be awakened to see him.

May your ears begin to hear your name being called in the sounds of your life.

May your nose smell the fragrance of Christ in the spring rain and food in the oven... and the smell of the bodies of those you love.

May your hands and feet touch the earth and ground... and feel the possibilities of life teeming in the soil beneath your feet.

May you taste the goodness of God in the food that grows from the earth, and in the candy inside your Easter egg, and the cup of coffee you drink in the morning, and in the cup of wine you have this evening.

May the resurrection rip your imagination open to all the luminous moments... so that you can see and live into the possibilities of God's life that is standing right in front of you and flowing all around you.

Amen.

Silent Reflection: "Every life is braided with luminous moments."³

Silent Prayer:

I watch this morning
for the light that the darkness has not overcome.
I watch for the fire that was in the beginning
and that burns still in the brilliance of the rising sun.
I watch for the glow of life that gleams in the growing earth
and glistens in sea and sky.

I watch for your light, O God,
in the eyes of every living creature
and in the ever-living flame of my own soul.

If the grace of seeing were mine this day,
I would glimpse you in all that lives.
Grant me the grace of seeing this day.
Grant me the grace of seeing.

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³ Ibid., 11.