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The Death of Death (II)

To think with the meaning of Christ's resurrection we must look behind the world; for from within the world such an event is supremely unnatural. We must dare to look into God, and see how no created thing is at all, but by his will. And *then* what may seem unnatural is the way in which God gives created nature rights against himself and shapes his will on her slow, groping motives.

How natural that Almighty Purpose should simply prevail; how natural that nature's rights should be withdrawn; how natural, how inevitable, that God at length should gather the harvest of his patience, and that in the ray of immortal light, we should be changed: that something created should be as he would have it.

But when? Looking forward, St. Paul hoped to know but did not know. Looking backward, he knew. Once there had been nothing God should wait for; when a life is lived, and death died, in simple self-offering to God, that God's love for all the world might be achieved. When we shall melt in the will of God to be refashioned, it will be the pain of fire, says St. Paul, so attached are we to the darling self we love, so fearful of the God who kills to make alive. Not so the resurrection of Christ. The killing had all been done already: there was nothing he had not offered up, nothing that had not been dissolved in his natural being, when his conscious mind was reduced to a snatch of verse just floating over the rising oblivion, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*. The killing had all been done; how then should the making alive be withheld? Would not the Son's perfect sacrifice have forced the Father's hand, if that had needed any forcing? Ah, no; what can be more covetous of opportunity than God's immortal love, his life-giving grace? He flows in like the tide to fill every cranny that opens: repent, and in a moment he has filled your heart. Christ's sacrifice was completed in his burial, and in a twinkling of an eye he was changed.

And now, do you see, I have scarcely overtaken what was supposed to be my starting-point: what has Christ done for us by his resurrection? What for us? But nothing one can say on this subject is much better than silence; what shall we say? He has given us the substance of glory. Being changed in God, he is the heart of heaven and he draws us into association with himself; the action of the man-in-God, the God-in-man, is an action he shares with us and entrusts to us. We have yet to be changed, to melt in the will of God--and even so, we already possess by association, and by attachment to Christ, that victorious and transfigured life after which we aspire. Our end is

unchangeably far--our fusion in God, our new-creation. And yet in Christ it is near, it is possessed; if any man be in Christ, he is--not shall be, but is--a new creation.

Ah--but like ignorant children, making toys of their mother's jewels, or like postal sorters passing packets and not thinking what contain, we handle our only treasure, the pearl of great price, and scarcely regard it. But that is not the matter of any single sermon, that is every sermon. Think what you have--be what you are--take your paradise.

The Christ of resurrection did inspire and may inspire terror, for he is what we shall be on the other side of the fire, and we fear the fire. Yet we read that the fear of the disciples turned to familiarity and kindness, for whatever the risen Christ be in himself he came to meet them and returned into the place and into the forms of flesh and blood; he talked, he listened, he gave himself to be touched, he shared their food. For the man-in-God, the man utterly molten and fashioned in God's will, is not separated, not fenced off from us. How would that serve the loving will of which he is made the sensitive instrument? We fear fire--yet al the fire will do will be to make us happy in living out the love of God; and Jesus, who needed no fire beyond the suffering of his passion, was moved by love to return among his disciples as the dear man they had known; and our painter, whatever you may think of his are, was no fool in the thoughts he conceived, when he showed our Saviour on his rounds in human guise, patiently knocking at the doors of our hearts.

Preached in Keble College Chapel, Oxford

The Rev. Austin Farrer

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