

GOING WITH THE LAMB

Easter Day 2023

April 9, 2023 — Richard L. Ullman

What I want is poetry. I suspect you may as well. But many days the best I can manage is to stammer. So I welcome the poetry of Isaiah:

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
—Isaiah 65:25*

Yet you and I both know the worldly truth of it: when wolf and lamb feed together, only one of them enjoys the meal.

Nevertheless, Isaiah stammers not. Rather, Isaiah sings God's gracious song:

*I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
—Isaiah 65:17*

The former things—those former things are remembered. We cannot get them out of mind. Old pain, old brokenness – they have such terrific staying power! No wonder we want poetry!

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At a high, solemn moment in every Eucharist, the priest lifts the blessed bread, and breaks it in the sight of all the people. A very young parishioner watched me do that one Sunday long ago. The crisp, thin wafer made a loud, cracking noise as it broke.

“Uh-oh!” my young friend exclaimed. “He broke it. Fr. Ullman’s in trouble now!”

Even in so young a life, there is a deep reservoir of painful brokenness. Sometimes the reservoir is so full that we cannot see the poetry, only the pain: “He broke it—he’s in trouble now!”

This same youngster loved coming forward to receive communion. He loved to receive his piece of what he calls “Jesus Bread” – the Supper of the Lamb.

Here is where poetry and pain are joined: the bread must be broken to be shared. That’s how Jesus Bread is made—in the breaking.

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Mary Magdalene and the other women go to the tomb with spices to anoint the broken body of Jesus. The tomb: that place of terrible brokenness.

Only when they go to that place of terrible brokenness do that does another, healing reality appear. It breaks upon them with all the beauty and power of a sunrise. Eager as my young friend running toward the altar for his piece of Jesus Bread, they run to tell the others what they experienced. No doubt they stammer—who would not? What happens next is brutal. It’s so brutal that, of the four Gospel writers, only one of them—Luke—includes it in his report:

*[Their] words seemed to [the others] an idle tale,
and the others did not believe them.*

—Luke 24:11

Those others are still living in the paralysis of painful memory. The paralysis possesses them – all they can hear is the loud cracking noise of their broken hopes: “Uh-oh! We’re in trouble now!” Terrible, terrible trouble.

I don’t know for scientific fact—indeed, nobody knows for scientific fact what Magdalene and friends experienced at the Empty Tomb. Whatever it was, it empowered them and their fellow friends of Jesus out into the here and now of their troubled world—and thus changed the world for ever after. Only a short distance beyond troubled brokenness they found the nourishment and life and joy of Jesus Bread.

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This morning is my fifty-sixth Easter as a Priest of the Risen Christ. Fifty-six Easters, and still I stammer. Fifty-six Easters, and here’s the best I can muster:

- Wolves still eat lambs.
- Things get broken all the time, dreadfully broken.
- We all are in trouble, terrible trouble.

So... which is the wiser choice: wolf or lamb?

We know all about choosing to go with the wolf. The wolf’s work is the perennial topic of news media and social media, not to mention sirens in the streets. We know all too dreadfully much about going with the wolf. With that choice, we surely remain in trouble!

What about choosing to go with the Lamb? (And let me say, “choosing the Lamb” is what we mean this morning when in a few moments we baptize and anoint two little lambs, Jay Colberg and Lucy Thomson. Listen up, Godparents, and make sure Lucy and Jay grow up choosing the Lamb.)

Those who choose the lamb—the Lamb of Jesus Bread—those who choose the Lamb of God find they are richly fed, deeply empowered.

Going with the Lamb doesn’t prevent the pain, but it can heal it.

Going with the Lamb doesn’t prevent brokenness and death, but it can empower us to move out of trouble,

Going with the Lamb sends us out of empty tombs into empowered life in our troubled here and now... toward the new heavens and the new earth God is creating.

That, I think, at least for me, is much of the meaning in this morning’s ancient call and response:

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Join me in it, please:

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.