

The Difficulty of Simplicity: Rediscovering the Easter Story This year at the fortnightly EACH Breakfast

Gathering we are exploring the theme of simplicity: What is simplicity? What are the barriers to simplicity? What are some steps we can take towards living more simply?

In my experience, the simpler the task the more difficult is it to actually do! Is there anything simpler than noticing our breathing and yet when we do, ten seconds later our minds will have run away with some distraction or another and we will need reminding again. (I think we will need at least one year to begin to learn about simplicity!).

I remember some years ago being among a group of tourists in India. We were all there in a small town to watch the sun rise over the Himalayas. After the first initial moment of awe we fell quickly into doing everything we could except watching the sun rise. We started taking photos of the sun rising; we commented on the colours of the sun rising; we made judgments about the sun rising – i.e. “it’s sooo amazing”. Some of us even complained that it was so early in the morning (as if the sun should rise later in the day! An effect perhaps of oxygen deprivation?). We shared with one another our experience of feeling cold (by saying things like “it’s soooo cold”) and what we would have for breakfast when we got back to the hotel.

We did so much and yet all that we came to do, all that was necessary, was to watch the sun rise. I went back wondering if I had actually done this at all!

The more simple the task the more difficult it is to do Simple tasks are difficult precisely because they are simple! Simplicity causes us to confront our anxieties; leaves us with nothing to hide behind. It strips us bare and makes us vulnerable to attack from our fears and insecurities. This is why meditation is actually very difficult - meditation is the practise of simplicity.

The habit of practising simplicity and exploring it’s meaning through the breakfast gatherings has caused me to see the Easter story from a different angle. The mainstream depictions of Easter tend to focus on images of sacrifice, injustice, cruelty and atonement alongside chocolate eggs, Easter bunnies (where did these come from?), and the last chance for a bit of a holiday before the colder weather sets in (for those of you reading this in the southern states). But this year, perhaps for the first time, I have recognised the Easter story as one of radical simplicity.

Whether we identify or not with the religious dimensions of Easter, the story of Jesus’ journey to the cross illuminates what a life of simplicity may look like. In a culture that is driven by a fear of missing out – missing out on a promotion or pay rise; missing out on due recognition or satisfaction or pleasure or the ‘next big thing’, Jesus’ journey to the cross matters because it tells the story of a person who overcame the fear of missing out – missing out on respect, esteem, belonging, admiration, acceptance – and finally overcame the fear of missing out on life itself. And he did this motivated by one thing alone – simple obedience to the will of God.

Thankfully the story does not end at this point. We do not face our anxieties and fears just to prove to ourselves or to others that we can. We face them because it is only when we pass through the Good Fridays of our lives we can experience the joys of the Easter Sundays. And there we can find greater peace and joy than we have ever imagined – life resurrected.

The Son is rising. All we have to do is watch.

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