

MEDITATION ON THE EUCHARIST
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016
DAVID LEE BELLER

Jesus has conquered DEATH. Matt Maher's song Christ is Risen calls us to "come awake" referring to coming alive from death, just as Jesus came alive on the third day:

Let no one caught in sin remain
Inside the lie of inward shame
We fix our eyes upon the cross
And run to Him who showed great love
And bled for us
Freely You've bled for us

Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling over death by death
Come awake, come awake
Come and rise up from the grave¹

In the middle, the still point of **time and everything** is Jesus of Nazareth, breaking bread, breaking his body, pouring out his blood, and sharing it with you... he passes around what later church leaders would call the "medicine of immortality."²

To know how big this is, you must hold your mental arms wide reaching backward to creation, and forward to the new heaven and new earth.

TO CREATION, which started out as formless and void, empty, but then, poetically:

God said . . . And God said . . . And God said . . .
Let there be . . . Let there be . . . Let there be . . .
It was so . . . It was so . . . It was so . . .
It was good . . . It was good . . . It was very good . . .³

TO NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH, which extends forever and the pierced one is on the throne

no temple . . . the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. ⁴

no sun or moon, the glory of God illuminates... the Lamb is a lamp for the nations to walk and the kings of the earth to bring their glory.

No shut gates. . . at day's end... there will be no night and the glory and honor of the nations are on display⁵

THE OBSTACLE: DEATH.

¹ Maher, Matt, "Christ is Risen,"

² St. Ignatius of Antioch, d. 110AD. *Letter to the Ephesians*

³ From Genesis 1:1 – 2:4, this phrasing captured in Jones, Barry D, *Dwell: Life with God for the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014), 40.

⁴ Revelation 21: 22.

⁵ Revelation 21: 23-26.

After God said “it is very, very good,” he also said, “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”⁶ And after a time, **they certainly did die**, but not until they had seen the death of animals so God could clothe them with the animal skins,⁷ after they saw the death of Abel at Cain’s hand... and Adam and Eve became part of a litany recorded in Genesis 5. Adam lived so many years... and he died... and Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalel... and they died.⁸

To put it crassly, “**Someone has to pay for all this**”

So God’s people know: All is not well. Even King David writes, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love... blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.”⁹ Because **DEATH** is what pays for sin.

But not in our world today, right? Death happens to other people—over there. We are so squeamish about death that we have our food “prepared” by others and presented to us in clean plastic wrap. “One of the main functions of “religion” has always been “to help, and especially to help people die. For this reason, religion has always been an attempt to explain death, and by explaining it, to reconcile man with it. Plato took great pains to make death desirable and even good.... And his view has been echoed in the history of human belief when confronted with the prospect of RELEASE from this world of change and suffering! We console ourselves with the idea that God made death, so it’s right.... Or with the idea that it belongs to the pattern of life [CIRCLE OF LIFE...] Anything to take the “awful uniqueness out of the experience of death.”¹⁰

Today’s religion is for those who are tired of having the world explained in terms of “another world” of which no one knows anything, and life explained as a “survival” about which no one has the slightest idea.... People are tired of having life given “value” in terms of death.¹¹ So... IGNORE IT.

Life ends with death. This is unpleasant, but since it is natural and universal, the best thing humans can do is accept it as natural. As long as a person lives, however, he need not think about it, but should live as though death did not exist. The best way to forget about death is to be busy, to be useful, to be dedicated to great and noble things, to build an always better world. If God exists, and if he, in His love and mercy wants to reward us for our busy, useful and righteous life with eternal vacations, traditionally

⁶ Genesis 2:17.

⁷ Genesis 3:21

⁸ Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31.

⁹ Psalm 51:1-2, 7a.

¹⁰ Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 97.

¹¹ Schmemmann, 98.

called “immortality,” it is strictly his gracious business. But immortality is an appendix (however eternal) to this life, in which all real interests, all true values are to be found. The American “funeral home” is indeed the very symbol of this religion, for it expresses both the quiet acceptance of death as something natural (a house among other houses with nothing typical about it) and the denial of death’s presence in life.¹²

But Death still abounds. Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned¹³—**And someone has to pay for all this.**

Long before David, Moses ministers to the people: several young Israelite men... sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people ...”¹⁴

Young men took bulls... Bulls plural. Moses puts half the blood in bowls. Ew! He dips the hyssop branches in the bowls and [MOTIONS] flings blood on the people.

See “...even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.’ ... “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”¹⁵

There is still the obstacle of death. Death exists. Death abounds. At the still point of **time and everything** we see Jesus, breaking bread, breaking his body, pouring out his blood, and sharing it with you...

Christianity does not RECONCILE with death. Christ REVEALS death, because he is the revelation of LIFE.¹⁶ One way the ancients referred to the inner life of God is a “dance.”¹⁷ They saw the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as beautiful, alive, and vivacious and moving, poetic and pure.

Jesus Christ is this Life. **Therefore, death is an enemy to be defeated not a mystery to be explained.**¹⁸
T. S. Eliot writes in his Four Quartets:

“At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

¹² Schmemmann, 98-99.

¹³ Romans 5:12.

¹⁴ Exodus 24:5, 8.

¹⁵ Hebrews 9:18-20, 22.

¹⁶ Schmemmann, 99.

¹⁷ Greek, “perichoresis,” Gregory of Nazianzus, fourth century.

¹⁸ Schmemmann, 100.

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.”¹⁹

Jesus sits in an upper room with a denier, a betrayer, and other followers with newly washed feet. At the same time Jesus is in deep communion with the Father and the Spirit. He is prayed up. He knows it is his blood that will be poured out this time—NOT SPRINKLED.²⁰

And so we see Jesus, reaching backward to creation and forward to new creation ... bringing them together at the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine. Christ is risen from the dead, trampling over death by death.”²¹ He does not reconcile. He does not make peace with death. He DESTROYS it with his own death.

He’s at the precipice of death. He has poured out his fears to the father. He’s calm like a ninja.

This is the new covenant. This is my body. This is my blood.

Because...

Someone has to pay for all this.

¹⁹ Eliot, T. S. “Burnt Norton,” (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 215-16.

²⁰ Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24.

²¹ Matt Maher, “Christ is Risen.”