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The Resurrection Experience and Hearing the Voice of the Lord

Although I had read the passages of the Bible recounting the narrative of Jesus' resurrection, and I had been taught the truth of his resurrection as a matter of doctrine, I had never felt the experience of his resurrection; reading about his resurrection was nothing more than the commemoration of a past event that would not be experienced until he came again. When I truly experienced the Resurrection as a present reality of the Lord's presence and activity, then I found confirmation of the experience in the Scriptures as opened to me by the Lord God. As Fox said:

Now the Lord God opened to me by His invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ, and I saw it shine through all; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the Light of life, and became the children of it; but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man; neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.

Fox also said:

The Scriptures were the prophet's words and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what as they spoke they enjoyed and possessed and had it from the Lord. Then what had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this, but what canst thou say?

I had always been struck by the narrative of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, recounted in chapter 20, verses 10-16, in the Gospel according to St. John. As you may recall, Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a gardener when he asks her why she is crying and for whom she is looking. Mary asks him if he knows where the body of Jesus has been placed. Then Jesus says, "Mary." At this she recognizes him. Earlier in the Gospel according to St. John, chapter 10, verses 1-16, Jesus relates the parable of the Good Shepherd to his disciples. At first they do not understand (verse 6)—like Mary, they were looking but not hearing—so the Lord reveals to them the lesson of the parable.

Several weeks after my experience this passage of scripture came to me and I reread it. I found a kinship with Mary Magdalene in that she was looking and not seeing the Lord, but when he chose to reveal himself to her she heard the voice of the Lord and she recognized him. Her shock is evident in her exclamation, and I can only say that when I experienced his resurrection I shook, and I shook my head in a combination of joy, awe, and fear at what I had experienced. Like Mary, I now have experienced the risen Lord as a present and active reality; so now I can say in answer to the question "what canst thou say?" the Lord is risen, and lives, and is active in our midst. This is what I have termed my "resurrection experience."

George Fox and the early Quakers proclaimed the risen Lord, actively present as our Prophet, Priest, King, and Teacher; for them, as for the Apostles, this living reality had to be experienced by each believer. I quote from *None Were So Clear* (pp. 51-52) in order to underscore what I have said:

The inward illumination that Fox testifies of ... was the voice of Christ. "And so Christ, 'by whom all things were made, he was the first, and he is the last;' and he is the Quakers' first speaker, and the last; for God hath spoken by his his Son," said Fox. Jesus Christ, the resurrected one, whose living presence saves and heals and enlightens—*he* is the cornerstone of the primitive Christian church and the primitive Quaker fellowship... He remains the core of the faith of the early Friends.

Several months after my experience of the Risen Lord, David Eley visited Evanston Friends Meeting, Evanston, Illinois, which he has been doing for many years. David shared his experience of and growth in the Spirit with the meeting, and he shared this message, gleaned from the Bible and the Journal of George Fox, as well as the writings of many early Friends: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). The preaching of Christ in us was and is unique to Friends, according to David, and this is also the focus of his article "Preaching Christ in Us," published in *The Conservative Friend* (Number 19, Second Month 2005). David cited other relevant passages of scripture that support this emphasis in the preaching of early Friends, but the one that struck me in relation to my experience was the following: "...when it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me..." (Galatians 1:15, 16). These words have now become my own, for I have had this inward experience, and now it is more than mere words on a page, but a life-giving reality.