

“Let Him Easter in Us”

From the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023

Matt Matthews

*Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson-cressed east.*

— Gerard Manley Hopkins,
“The Wreck of the Deutschland”

The Lord is risen.

The Lord is risen, indeed.

I’ve been pondering that line from Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cressed east.”

The poem is Hopkin’s masterpiece, his 36-stanza, 288-line telling of “The Wreck of the Duetschland.” But it’s only this one line, the fourth from the last that has transfixed me: “Let him easter in us . . .”

Strictly and archaically, to “easter” means to turn towards or travel to the east. Hopkins may have that secular definition partly in mind. But he’s playing with the reader. East is the direction from with the morning light gathers and the sun dawns. Resurrection is thought of as coming from the east. Many old graveyards are laid out in such a way that the feet of the buried face east. So that, when Christ comes again, the dead will figuratively sit up and come face to face with our Lord.

But Hopkins isn’t talking mainly about a direction—the east. He’s talking about the risen Lord working within us, “eastering” within us. Jesus brightens the darkness within us, as a “dayspring to the dimness of us.” Jesus is like a crimson torch leading through the darkness of the night before resurrection dawn. Jesus is the one who shines a light upon our path. He “easterns” within us, leading us, guiding our steps, directing us—through the storm, through the night, through, even, the valley of the shadow of death, about which Jesus knows intimately.

He ‘easterns’ in us. Jesus rubs off on us. Jesus quickens our pulse to the tune of *Holy, holy, holy, LORD God almighty, early in the morning, our song shall rise to thee.*

He ‘easterns’ in us. He trains our ear to hear birdsong and the trickle of nature’s song. And he helps us hear the longing in our brother and sister. He helps us hear the cries of distress from those who have been forsaken—as he was forsaken on a cross.

He ‘easterns’ in us. Jesus orients us to the wonder and awe of creation, the glory of God’s love passed from hand to human hand.

He ‘easterns’ in us. He shapes and sharpens our intellect. He stiffens our resolve to do good in the world, to stand up against apathy and evil.

He ‘easterns’ in us. His Spirit works within our flesh. He orients our thinking, our passions, and energy, our conscience. He walks with us. His voice is in our voice, his touch is in our touch, he thoughts are in our thoughts. He whispers and sings and cries out. He won’t let go. He ‘easterns’ in us.

"I will build you," says the prophet (Jeremiah 31:4), "and you shall be built." Jesus is the builder, the cornerstone, the co-worker, and sweating, spiritual friend, the one swinging the hammer, the one making all things new.

He 'easters' in us.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love," God says in Jeremiah. Jesus is the lover, the one who said as he was dying on the cross, "Forgiven them, for they know not what they do."

He was giving us the benefit of doubt, which we did not deserve then or now. But, from the foundation of time and even from the dizzying height of the cross, he was eastering in us.

"You shall take your tambourines," says Jeremiah, "and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers." Jesus is the LORD of the dance. He easters in us.

"And you shall plant vineyards...and enjoy the fruit." Jesus is true vine; his sacrifice is our cup of salvation.

He easters in us.

"O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good," the Psalmist proclaims (118:1). "God's steadfast love endures forever!" Jesus is the *forever* for us. Jesus is the love in us that spoils unless we share it. Jesus begs and equips us to use our hands and our energies to bear God's love to others. He easters in us, forever dawning on and in us.

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." She fetched Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. Many believe this is John. They ran to the tomb. John arrived first, but waited for Peter, who blustered in and saw it was empty, saw the funeral clothes lying there. Then John went in, and scripture says John believed.

John believed. We don't know what Peter made of the scene.

And Mary did not. Mary did not believe. Not yet.

She mistook the Jesus for gardener.

"Woman why are weeping?" he asked. "For whom are you looking?"

"Sir," she said, "if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

And that's when Mary believed. He said her name. She knew she was known. The one who had promised to love forever and to never abandon his friends, had not left her. He had not left those disciples. He had been eastering in them. Jesus has been kindling a holy light to dawn in the graveyard dark, a dayspring to the dimness of us all, a crimson-cresseted east.

Jesus easters in us still, especially in the dark times we think we may not survive. Jesus easters in us, kindling perfect light at the edge of every dawn.

The Lord is Risen.

The Lord is risen, indeed.