

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings

April 2023

His Mirth

G.K. Chesterton ended his great book *Orthodoxy* with an evocative reflection on the Savior's mortal life. It seemed to Chesterton that the Mortal Messiah had

*concealed something. . . . He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.*¹

It is an arresting passage. But I'm not at all sure that Chesterton was right. As I read the New Testament, it seems that the Savior must have smiled often and laughed warmly. I sense a streak of holy mirth in His reverence for nature and His relish for human sociality. I see it as well in His ironic ripostes to friends and foes alike. But it is in the accounts of His resurrected ministry that the Savior's mighty mirth erupts with titanic, eternal delight.

Consider:

When He rises in triumph, He hurls the great stone unceremoniously aside, but He leaves the burial sheets neatly folded in the tomb—a delicate, mirthful touch.

When He appears to Mary Magdalene, He disguises Himself as the gardener, leads her along with innocent questions, then spurs holy recognition by simply pronouncing her name.

When He appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He again poses innocent questions, then guides His friends gently through the full

sweep of messianic prophecy and psalm, before once again prompting recognition through the communal breaking of bread—then vanishes, I fancy with a smile, from their sight.

When He appears to the Twelve behind closed doors, He doesn't bother to knock. He doesn't even open the door. He simply interrupts their whispered rumors—had His body been basely stolen or did He really live again?—by emerging abruptly in resurrected glory. Terrified, the disciples think they have seen a ghost. Jesus responds by casually asking for something to eat. He then eats before their jaw-dropped gazes—some broiled fish and a honeycomb—and asks, in effect, “What are you staring at? You must know that ghosts don't eat . . .”

When He appears on the shore while the disciples are at sea, He calls out another innocent question: “Have you caught anything?” He then reenacts the miraculous haul that brought those fisher-disciples in the first place to His fold. Once again, He orchestrates a stunning flash of recognition. John says, “It is the Lord,” and Peter leaps joyfully into the sea.

I want to speak reverently here. When we speak of the Savior's Resurrection, we tread upon the holiest of ground. But I want to suggest that there is, running through these accounts, a torrent of irrepressible joy, mingled with something like consummate mirth.

This should not surprise us. “The elements are eternal,” our doctrine declares, “and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:33). The accounts of Christ's Resurrection show us what a fulness of joy looks like; they even hint at what it feels like.

In His resurrected ministry among the Nephites, the Savior prayed and preached, healed and communed. “And now behold,” He then announced, “my joy is full” (3 Ne. 17:20).

At times, He wept while He blessed them; at times He smiled as He watched them pray (see 3 Ne. 17:21; 19:25). Always He felt the joy that comes to a spirit and body inseparably connected—the joy of performing His Father’s will. Always He strove to impart that joy to those He loved.

On this point we have the united witness of the Nephite multitudes: “No one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Ne. 17:17).

Sometimes, I believe, that joy expressed itself as mirth.

This month we celebrate Easter—the highest of all High Holy Days. To me it is the greatest, most joyous day of all the year. Some years, on Easter morn, I drag my reluctant children along to go “Easter caroling” to our neighbors. To me, even the anticipation of body and spirit being inseparably united brings a foretaste of fulness of joy.

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (John Lane, 1909) 298-299.

² *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007) 49.

“[T]he fundamental principles of our religion,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”²

We don’t often say so explicitly, but this university is grounded in our common faith in the literal resurrection. “Education for eternity”³ presupposes an eternity of learning in a resurrected state. A university “enlightened by living prophets”⁴ presupposes the ministry of ordained Apostles—special witnesses of a loving, living, resurrected Lord.

“And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!” (D&C 76:22).

Indeed He does; indeed we do.

Hosanna to the Lord of the Easter morn!

All praise to the God of the empty tomb!

³ Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity” in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams* (John S. Tanner ed., 2022) 159-184.

⁴ “The Mission of Brigham Young University” in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams* (John S. Tanner ed., 2022) 65.