

Last week I read an article about what airline pilots do when one of their electronic systems malfunctions. As you may know we live in the age of “fly-by-wire,” when sophisticated flight management systems can literally fly the plane from runway to runway with minimal human input. Somewhere in every passenger jet’s cockpit is a panel of circuit breakers, and what I learned in reading that article is that, when one of the electronic systems misbehaves or completely malfunctions, airline pilots do not even try to troubleshoot it. They simply reach behind them or above, grab the circuit breaker for that particular system, turn it off and then back on. 99% of the time, according to the pilots themselves, the system corrects itself when it wakes back up.

We don’t have to be airline pilots to know that this works. Our computers, our smartphones, our modems and routers at some point require us to do the same thing – either hit a reset key, or an on off key or, in the worst case, unplug the thing and plug it back in. And we know that if none of those actions work, we probably have a much bigger problem. I’ve always found it amazing how the virtual universe mimics the real universe, even when it comes to resetting malfunctions.

Have you ever felt the desire or the need to restart your life? There can be many influences and events that can lead us to such a desire, but historically no event has ever had a greater effect in creating that desire than the person of Jesus of Nazareth. There are two central messages that emerge from the New Testament – one is about Jesus, and the other is about us.

We hear the message about Jesus in the astonishing words of the Simon Peter when Jesus asks his apostles a question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, ‘You are

the Messiah.’ And Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.” What a different message we hear from Christ in this passage as compared to Jesus’ final words to his Apostles in Matthew 28: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” So what happens between Jesus’ urgent message in Mark for his disciples to keep his identity a secret, and his message to the same disciples at the end of Matthew to declare his identity to the world?

The answer to that question is found in Peter’s response to Jesus just after his confession. Peter is not prepared for what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah was an archetype of triumph in Judaism, just as it still is today. The continuing Jewish interpretation of the Messiah is of a human being born of two parents. The father of the Messiah will have direct connection to the house of David. The concept is that of a leader, a great human being under whose rule the Jews will be gathered into their homeland, the Temple will be rebuilt, world peace will be established.

Compare that vision, which still exists in Judaism today, to how Jesus explains the meaning of the Messiah: “Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Hearing those words, is it any wonder that Peter privately responds to Jesus in alarm and denial? Mark tells us that Peter “began to rebuke him.” A rebuke could have been anything from, “I will never let this happen to you,” to, “Are you out of your mind, Jesus? How could you say something so ridiculous?” Whatever Peter said to Jesus, it must have been strong, perhaps even angry, because he takes Jesus aside from the other disciples to speak with him.

But Jesus does not respond in private to Peter: “But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’” Peter knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he had no idea that the Messiah was the Son of God. It would take much more than words for Peter to restart his life. As human beings, how do we set our mind on divine things? Do we feel it is a divine thing when we are paying our bills or struggling with illness? Do we feel it is a divine thing when we are wrestling with marriage and family issues? Do we feel it is a divine thing when we are struggling with our jobs, our relationships, our hopes, dreams, and plans for the future.

Peter had dreams just like us. He dreamed of peace and freedom, of hope and happiness under the rule of God’s Messiah, and how broken and shattered he must have felt when he heard Jesus predict the horror of his death and the seeming impossibility of a resurrection from death. The world has a way of making us feel broken and shattered, doesn’t it? Even if we get everything that we want, we still want what we cannot have. Is there ever a reset key for the human condition? Is there ever a way to set our mind on divine things?

Remember that Peter was one of those who stood on the mountaintop with Jesus, and then went out into the world to make disciples of all nations. What happened in between his confession and his mission? Peter experienced, in a real and personal way, the resurrected Christ. Has there ever been any greater restart than the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth? It was we who pulled the plug on the Son of God when we crucified him on the cross, but it was God who raised his Son from the tomb, and left us with the one way to set our mind on the divine, and to live in an entirely new way. Peter received a new

life, as did all of Christ's disciples; as do we, when we experience the real presence of the living Christ.

What is your purpose in life? Why did God put you here? Was it to sit in a pew today and hear a sermon, or some nice music, or to recite some prayers? Or are our lives much more than the religion that we practice on Sunday morning? Our worship for two thousand years has been nothing less than to experience the real presence of the resurrected Christ, for without that experience we are little more than dreamers of a dream. But we are not dreamers – we are believers – and our lives must become entangled and infused with the divine.

There is not a moment of life God gives to us that we cannot hit the reset key, and start doing what God has called us to do. One of my favorite writers is Anne Lamont, who has become a national figure because of her unique take on Christianity. Lamont grew up in Northern California with atheist parents. As a young teenager, she started drinking and using drugs. She writes openly about her long struggles with addiction, sexual promiscuity, bulimia, and self-loathing. When she hit 30, things came to a crisis point, and in the throes of a hangover, just after having an abortion, Lamont says she felt the tangible presence of Jesus. A week later, she found herself at a Presbyterian church, pulled in by the music, and it was at this church, a church to which she still belongs, that her life changed forever. In her book "Help Thanks Wow: Three Essential Prayers," Lamont writes this: "I pray not to be such a whiny, self-obsessed baby, and give thanks that I am not quite as bad as I used to be (talk about miracles). Then something comes up, and I overreact and blame and sulk, and it feels like I haven't made any progress at all. But it turns out I'm less of a brat than

before, and I hit the reset button much sooner, shake it off, and get my sense of humor back.”

What reset key do we need to find this morning? Christ is waiting to change our lives in the greatest and smallest things, if we but ask him to heal us, to start us again. At the end of the day, we all need a fresh start. And there is only one key to restarting our souls, and it is not in our hands, but it is in the hand of the one who reaches out for us right now.

Amen