

Easter 2007

Author Gay Talese knew from a young age that he wanted to be a writer; problem was, that his talents didn't seem to lie in the realm of crafting words. His father Joseph was a tailor, and he always reminded his academically average son that he could always fall back on the tailoring business, and in fact make a good career for himself; if he did well, the business could take him to places like Paris, and he could make a great living for himself if he really applied. Joseph made reference to Paris each time Talese the younger brought home average to mediocre grades; if only B's were the worst. But many of his papers earned him C's and even D's, and one time, after he had misspelled Shakespeare's name in an essay on Hamlet, even an F. The teacher was critical of sentences which she said were "too wordy" and "indirect"—ponder the irony of that in an essay on Shakespeare—and she would underline things in red ink and write: Syntax! Syntax! Syntax! The young Talese wasn't really sure how those comments even related to his writing. And to be honest, I, as an English major, had to go and look up the word "syntax" myself. There are many times in life when it seems like dreams start fading away, that plans we hope to accomplish must be revisited, revised, and then relinquished. There are times, when the discouragement of repeated failure starts to hound us, and tell us to expect nothing more. And then, there are the times when all the indicators are all wrong. Syntax indeed; Talese went on to become a best selling author, and he credits his success not to his teachers who taught him how to write, nearly so much as to his parents, who taught him how to listen; it was in learning how to listen that he learned how to tell stories; let the authors tell the story, and the editors worry about the syntax.

There is a fine balance in our lives between our assessments of what is, in the here and now now, and our expectations; where do we see this going, this train of thought, this course of action? I never expected to become a great baseball player because I couldn't make contact with the baseball to save my life; and since I never expected much to ever come of baseball, I never took it very seriously. I changed majors because of one Chemistry class that had become a hurdle I just couldn't quite get over. Sometimes, we let go of our plans for today, because our expectations for tomorrow have become so bleak. In the days leading up to his death, the expectations of Jesus' followers were undergoing many rapid changes. They had been expecting many things: establishment of a kingdom, perhaps; restoration of Israel to greatness, perhaps uniting the people so strongly that they could rise up and reclaim their nation; but they really thought that he would continue to be there. They didn't expect his death, even though Jesus told them

that the Son of Man must first die and rise again, they didn't understand *that*, because they didn't understand *why*, didn't understand that Jesus came, not to take on the authorities, but to take on death itself. All of their expectations were rooted in space and time, just as they had encountered everything else in existence, this even though he had spoken of the glory he shares with the Father, even though Peter, John, and James saw a glimpse of that glory at the Transfiguration. They didn't understand the profoundness of the Transubstantiation which had occurred at the Last Supper; to them, all of these events of the week added up only to defeat. To them, it looked like it was all over. The magnetic, authoritative teachings: done. The miracles, the healings, the raising of people from the dead: no more. The camaraderie, the friendship, the bonding: all finished. Their assessment of things on Easter Sunday morning, because they did not expect the resurrection of Jesus' body, was that all this was the denouement, the wrap up of the story. Bury their friend, anoint his body so that he received a proper burial, mourn over him. They would probably come and pay their respects, honor his remains; certainly that gravesite would be remembered. And then, back to their lives without him. It had been, for certain, an incredible run, an amazing encounter with the most fascinating prophet. But honestly, as they carried themselves that Easter morning, they expected, really, no more.

Easter is the high point of the Church liturgical year; we wouldn't even bother with Advent, Christmas, or anything else if it wasn't for this all-important event. It is the high point of the year, but hardly the end of it. There is still much more to ponder, many more mysteries which we must enter into to garner the fullness of what Jesus did for us, and what he has in store for us. Easter is not the end; it is the beginning of the greatest of events which we have to look forward to. The events leading up to this day were great enough, but the greater gifts are yet to be bestowed. Before his death, Jesus raised others from the dead; on this day, he was raised and his resurrection meant not the continuation of his earthly life, but the foundation of eternal life for all those who are joined to him. Before his death, he was transfigured for a few moments; after Easter, he lives in glory, and will bring all who belong to his Mystical Body to that same glory. In his days of teaching and preaching, he offered profound insights into human nature; after Easter, he exalts that human nature, opening the gates of heaven so that what is proper to God can be availed to his brothers and sisters in the flesh. Although they did not know it, there was so much awaiting his followers as they made their way to the empty tomb: appearances, mandates, sacraments, power; he would eat with them, they would watch him ascend to heaven, they would experience the sending of the Holy Spirit. It was so

“not over.” The greatest of Jesus works were yet to come, even though his friends thought they were going to the tomb to mourn the end.

The thing that is most despicable about death is its finality: never again, it would seem, do we get to enjoy the love and companionship of those who have died, and never again do we get to enjoy the good things of life after we pass on. But on Easter Sunday, Jesus crushed the finality of death; what death meant to Jesus is what it now means to his followers, namely, that it is not the end, but rather is the beginning, and not just the beginning, but the beginning of a life that far surpasses the pleasures and joy and love which we experience here. There is so much more ahead for man than what he knows in this world: not only the glorification of his body and perfection of his will, and the love and companionship which he cherished here, but peace which surpasses anything known to us in this life, security that it will never be lost, and the things of heaven which we have yet to even imagine, much less experience.

There are times when perhaps we ought to accept defeat, but more often, there comes a time to overcome setbacks, and to rise to the occasion as challenges and struggles are set before us. The apostles and the other followers of Jesus may have been ready to accept defeat on Easter Sunday morning, but there was no defeat for them to accept; the reality was, that *Jesus*—their friend, teacher, master—was the conqueror that day, not the Romans, not the Sanhedrin, not the devil. The ultimate defining moment was not when he breathed his last in apparent defeat, but when he rose again in certain victory. As a young writer who did not use very good syntax learned, “C”s in writing don’t spell the end of writing careers. Our pasts don’t have to define us, nor should they—they should just be used as one of the many tools to help steer us in the present. What some might take to be the end of something—a career, a relationship—is often the beginning of something new. The empty tomb was not the end, but rather the beginning of the greatest chapter in the lives of Jesus’ followers, and of all believers ever since. And because of that empty tomb, death is no longer the end, but the great and glorious beginning of eternal life, not a monster to be feared, but a passage to be prepared for. This day, Easter, is indeed the day the Lord has made: the day that comes after both our earthly labors and our earthly rests; the day when mere dreams may end, and be replaced by a glorious and eternal day which knows no end.

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