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“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God”  
(John 3:6).

*Acts 4:23-31; John 3:1-8*

The design of Luke’s Gospel and Acts of the Apostles was once described as an hourglass on its side, with the narrative of Jesus life narrowing in focus to his death and then expanding again as the Apostles take the mystery of the resurrection and Pentecost into the world. Acts also parallels the story of Jesus with the ministry of his disciples. What he did, they do. He healed the sick; the Apostles heal a cripple. He escaped from the tomb; they walk free from prison to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus is the beginning of a transformation meant to reach the ends of the earth. His death and resurrection offer the pattern for every Christian disciple.

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection is an event that reveals the promised passage from life through death to new life. Baptism ritualizes this life-long process of dying to self to live for others, the secret of how we reclaim our original state and the image and likeness of God. Jesus revealed what a human being is meant to be. Discipleship is about becoming our true selves. But this transformation is possible only by God’s gift. Grace perfects nature. We must be recreated by the Holy Spirit. It is like being reborn.

The fourth Gospel presents the brilliant scholar Nicodemus as someone who is still in darkness. He comes at night to encounter Jesus but cannot grasp how rebirth in the Spirit is necessary to transcend his human limits. He cannot imagine an adult re-

entering the womb to be born again. Yet this image describes the radical difference between material existence and new life in the Spirit. The scene described may well be a post-resurrection encounter as the faithful Pharisee stands at the threshold of transformation, struggling to grasp the new life Jesus is offering him. He represents the rabbinic Judaism being invited to faith in Christ. Christians are already living the resurrection even as they live in this world. They have passed from death to new life, now free to preach as the Apostles can, unafraid of any attempt to contain or intimidate them from proclaiming peace, justice and compassion.

Easter People are supposed to be daring, fearless and free. They have seen the end of the story in the middle, and they know that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. What Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection is the Good News they now live and take to the ends of the earth.

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