

“Resurrect Yourself”

Alleluia. The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Now that we have gotten that out of the way we can go back to feeling sorry for ourselves because we are stuck at home unable to out with friends and family, unable to have big Easter celebrations and Easter egg hunts, unable to shop, unable to go to church, and all the other things we want to do.

Compare our situation to the disciples of Jesus on that first Easter morning and you will see how similar our situations are. They were huddled together in isolation. They were unsure of what was happening. Things seemed to be changing around them quickly and dramatically.

The one thing that they did not have at that moment, something that we have now is the knowledge of the resurrection. We know that Jesus was raised from the dead. We know that the disciples would find courage, and despite persecution they would go on to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They learned, as we will learn, that when things look darkest and most threatening we are not alone. Indeed, it is in the darkest of times that God seems to be most present to us. It is not because God is at other times distant or self-isolating. Rather it is because in times of trial we let down our guard. When the things that we surround ourselves with such entertainment, the business of busyness, and our daily cares and worries are no longer there to insulate us from the divine, then God breaks through.

Thirty-five years ago this spring my life was a mess. The woman I thought I would marry had broken up with me. My job which had been so important to me no longer felt worthwhile. Additionally, my parents were undergoing health challenges. I felt lost and at times desolate. I decided I would visit a friend who was at that time attending Yale Divinity School. It had been at least a year since we had visited and he was about to graduate. This would be the last time to visit him and his wife in New Haven.

The way these things go I missed my train and had to catch a later one which got me to New Haven around 9 p.m. Gary picked me up and brought me to his apartment. We had a beer and chatted for a while. As Gary's wife Cherry made up the sofa bed for me Gary asked me if I would go to chapel with him in the morning. I tried to sound enthusiastic, but I agreed more because I was raised to be a good guest than because I had any interest in chapel. At that time in my life I was non-religious. I would not have even described myself as spiritual/not religious had the term been coined. I had left the church of my youth and wanted nothing to do with any of it. But Gary asked me to go and so I went.

I received communion that morning for the first time in many years. It was a life altering experience. I felt the wine and bread of Holy Communion circulating through my body. Every cell of my being was changed and enlivened in ways I did not understand. It was the beginning of a transformation that resurrected my faith and preposterously led me to the priesthood.

That is the way God works. The Holy Spirit catches us at a time when our defenses are down and sneaks in, just as she caught me that morning. It is still up to us to recognize the invitation and struggle with it and live into what it means.

We have been living lives that seemed fairly well established. We have hopes and dreams, and we think we knew how to obtain them. We might even be very comfortable in our faith, and think we have God figured out. Then this crisis hit and our comforts, routines and expectations have all been overthrown. We can wait until the crisis subsides and go back to living the same way as before, or we can take this time to find our true self and our real life. The life that God has been calling us to when we were filling up our days with stuff, even very important stuff, but stuff nonetheless.

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not think that God sent COVID-19 as judgement on the world for our sins any more than I think God sent Hurricane Katrina to punish New Orleans, HIV to punish gay men or any of scores of disaster, pandemics and the like. God does not work in that way. But as the bumper sticker says, (ssshh...) things happen. It is not what happens so much as how we respond to them.

We have the opportunity this Eastertide to live into a new life. We can shed possessions and obsessions that are keeping us in a holding pattern. We can open ourselves to new possibilities and potentials that God has made ready for us. We can have our eyes opened as the disciples did and see that what we thought was important was nothing near what God had prepared for us. As Paul wrote in the Letter to the Romans, "We have been buried with [Christ] by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness." We have this season to walk in new life rather than our pre-isolation life.

I would like to share a poem that I read each Easter that says this better than I can.

The Easter Challenge *by Joyce Rupp*

Every year it happens:
earth shakes her sleepy head,
still a bit wintered and dull,
and feels new life stirring.
Every year cocoons give up their
treasures,
fresh shoots push through brown
leaves,
seemingly dead branches shine with
green,
and singing birds find their way
home.
Every year we hear the stories:
empty tomb, surprised grievers,
runners with news and revelation,
unexpected encounters,

conversations on the road,
tales of nets filling with fish,
and breakfast on a seashore.
And every year
the dull and dead in us
meets our Easter challenge:
to be open to the unexpected,
to believe beyond our security,
to welcome God in every form,
and trust in our own greening.

The disciples threw in their lot with the Risen Lord. We can too. This Easter Day is the day of our Lord's Resurrection, and it can be the day of our resurrection too. A resurrection to a new life that follows the way of God toward a new world that values peace, justice and every life just as Jesus taught and God so desires for every part of creation.

Repeat after me...

Alleluia.

The Lord is risen.

Let us be risen with him.

Alleluia.

Amen.