

Resurrection is Ours

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Matthew 28.1-10

Easter 2008

Happy Easter! It's the day of new beginnings. You know, my great-aunt Gladys witnessed a new beginning once. Her husband, Arthur, had gambled away their savings. He was trying to keep that fact hidden from her, hoping to replace the losses before Aunt Gladys found out. But one day after supper, Uncle Arthur suddenly fell ill. For the sake of delicacy, I won't share the details, but I will just say that he was so sick he not only retired to his bed but he needed a bucket by the bed...a bucket that he was putting to use every few seconds.

Uncle Arthur got really scared and so he called my great-aunt into the bedroom and he said, "Gladys, darling, I don't think I'm going to make it. If I'm about to leave this world I want to go with a clean conscience. I have to confess something...I gambled away our life savings; I'm so sorry."

My great-aunt just stroked his brow and said, "Honey, I know you gambled away all our money, that's why I poisoned your dinner." Uncle Arthur miraculously survived and he never gambled again. Second chances. New beginnings. That's what Easter is all about.

Easter is the ultimate second chance.

Last week, we heard the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem . He's a wise teacher. He's a healer. He's a prophet. In his presence, people experience the power of God somehow. People in hopeless situations are having their hope renewed. The buzz is growing and people are starting to suspect that he may be the deliverer they have been waiting for. Maybe he'll raise an army and confront the Roman empire and declare freedom for the Jewish homeland.

And so as he enters the holy city, his fans are greeting him, and the commotion they are causing attracts others to come see what all the fuss is about. They are shouting "Hosanna" which means, "Save us." And they are quoting a line from the psalms, "blessed is the one who comes in God's name!"

Of course, drawing large crowds and being called a king was just the kind of publicity that could cause a lot of trouble for Jesus. To make matters worse, Jesus goes straight to the Temple and causes a scene.

The Temple had money-changers, or money exchangers we could say. Travelers could exchange their foreign currency for local coinage that could then be used to buy the sacrificial animals.

But Jesus seems to think that the money changers are cheating people. Perhaps they weren't exchanging the money for free. Maybe they were charging to exchange the money and then charging again for the animals they were selling...that kind of double dipping apparently infuriated Jesus. So, he throws a tantrum and overturns the tables and calls the money changers thieves.

The Temple priests were part of the Roman power structure, so to cause a scene in the Temple is basically the same as vandalizing a government building...it's a major offense.

So, this Jesus who is called Messiah and who can attract crowds and heal the sick and have people call out to him to save them from Rome, who is so bold as to walk into Herod's Temple and disturb the peace and damage the property...he's now attracted the notice of some powerful people, people who quickly become his enemies. And they immediately conspire against him.

A few days later it's Good Friday. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried, condemned, and executed.

But that's not the end of the story! Some women show up at the tomb thinking that was the end only to discover a new beginning.

What they experienced was Resurrection. They didn't see Jesus being resurrected. They didn't witness whatever happened to Jesus...they just discovered an empty tomb and a reminder that life is full of possibilities. Resurrection wasn't a quantifiable event that they observed, it was a qualitative experience that they had. They discovered that Golgotha is no match for God.

I don't believe that Resurrection is about a moment in history. I don't believe that it's about what happened to one person, one time. That story had already been told. Julius Caesar was said to have risen from his funeral pyre to new life among the stars. Hercules sacrificed himself and was resurrected to live eternally among the stars. Osiris is torn to pieces but Isis gathers the pieces back together and Osiris is resurrected to new life. The hero who dies a sacrificial death and who is raised to new life is an old story, older than the Jesus story; but those stories about the hero. Jesus' story is something more.

Golgotha isn't necessarily part of God's plan, but if it should happen, God has a plan so that Golgotha doesn't get the last word. You'll never hear me say that God desired or required Jesus' death on the cross...but I do believe that God shared in Jesus' suffering on the cross, and that Resurrection is God's response to it. When you're hurting, that's not God's will, but God is with you in the difficult moment, and is responding to your pain with Resurrection power and grace.

The story of Jesus' resurrection isn't about just him escaping death...its inclusive of the community. The women at the tomb experience it. Later the brothers will experience it. As they go forward to Galilee and beyond, they will continue to experience it and to share it.

In life, Jesus' power was in what he gave to others; and beyond the cross, his power remains in what he gives to others. By experiencing resurrection, the church was empowered to embrace hope and life and courage and healing and to go forward. That is good news for us still...

The disappointments and difficulties happen, but they can't define us nor must they be the end of our story. Golgotha is real and it is horrible and it is not the last chapter.

Osiris is raised and it's good for Osiris. Hercules is raised and it's good for Hercules. Caesar is raised and it's good for Caesar. But JESUS IS RAISED AND IT'S GOOD FOR US. His resurrection is our own. He lives in us, with us, for us, creating a symbiosis that gives hope and power to us all. By experiencing Jesus beyond the grave, his friends experienced more of God in their own lives, and that's the point. Jesus isn't one more hero who cheated death...the story books are full of those. Jesus is the friend who says in life and beyond, "I'm with you and together, we can do anything."

Jesus didn't save the people from imperialism by confronting Rome with guerrilla warfare. He saved them, and us, from the degrading and demoralizing effects of oppression by proving in the lives of his friends and followers that dignity won't stay dead! And that is a gift that he gives us today...Jesus affirms our dignity and reminds us that dignity won't stay dead. With that, we can face today and tomorrow and every obstacle in life. Dignity won't stay dead – not Jesus', not ours.

Whatever difficulty we've faced, whatever disappointment we've endured, our hope and our dignity and our joy can be resurrected in this holy instant. Dignity won't stay dead. In life and beyond life, Jesus affirms our dignity and that is what can flourish no matter what else is going on in our world. Jesus' resurrection is ours, and it's ours today. We can claim it and live in its power starting right now. This is the Good News. Amen.

**Jesus' resurrection is mine.
I'm lifted up by the power of hope.
I'm lifted up by the power of love.
I'm lifted up by the power of joy.
I'm lifted up by the power of God.
I live in Resurrection Power.
And so it is!**

“Christmas and Easter and attitudinal bookends for an enlightened worldview. With an enlightened view of Christmas, we understand that it is within our power, through God, to give birth to a divine Self. With an enlightened view of Easter, we understand that this Self is the power of the universe, before which death itself has no real power.” – Marianne Williamson