

Resurrection Continues

by Rev. Durrell Watkins

John 20.19-23

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My great-uncle Arthur suspected that my great-aunt Gladys had developed a hearing problem. He decided to test his hypothesis. She was washing dishes after dinner one night, and so he stood behind her and said, "Gladys, can you hear me?" No response. He moved closer and said, "Gladys, can you hear me?" Nothing. He got right up on her and said, "Gladys, can you hear me?" And she turned and shouted at him, "For the THIRD time, YES!!!"

The Resurrection continues today, and it continues in its coy, almost mischievous way that we see it throughout the gospels. You see, resurrection isn't a matter for general inspection; in scripture resurrection is a matter of revelation. The resurrection is revealed to a few, not thrown in the faces of the many. The stories of Resurrection don't speak of it as an experience in the Temple before large crowds, but in private homes and intimate settings. The Resurrection doesn't happen in the presence of imperial authorities, but in secret places where people are hiding from those very authorities. Resurrection continues...it isn't obvious, it isn't something we can watch on the evening news; it is quiet, private, personal, an experience of the faithful, a reassurance for those who are in most desperate need of reassurance.

That's what we see today in the gospel reading. "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'"

Friends in hiding, behind locked doors, trapped by their own fears that have left them immobilized - they experience the peace of Christ. That peace that breaks through the fear, that hope that breaks through the despair, that glimpse of possibility that breaks through the pessimism...that is Resurrection. And it happened, and it continues to happen, and if we will turn within and quiet our minds for a moment, we may find that it is happening even now. A healing presence comes into our painful places and gently reminds us, "Peace is available to you." And we are uplifted! Resurrection continues.

The peace that Jesus brings isn't the absence of turmoil. He's just been executed; his friends are in hiding afraid that something terrible might happen to them. And, they sometimes get on each other's nerves. Thomas, for example, isn't with them today. He isn't hiding. He is the only one who has been able to summon the courage to be out and about, taking care of whatever business needed attending. He must be very annoyed with his cowardly companions.

Similarly, while Thomas is out, the others have this resurrection experience. They will later tell Thomas about it, and he doesn't believe them. How annoyed they must be with Thomas that they have experienced something dramatic and life changing and he dismisses their experience as mere grief induced hysteria.

But Thomas doesn't leave them. They don't leave Thomas. Somehow, in the midst of their strife, conflict, fear, regret, confusion, disagreements...they remain in relationship. They work it out. They make a choice to work together even when they don't see eye to eye, even when they disagree strongly...they still believe that together they are the ever-living body of Christ. Thomas' skepticism and his friends cowardice can't destroy the bonds of community they have formed and to which they have committed. THAT is peace. Not that everything will go smoothly, but that it doesn't have to go smoothly for us to love one another and to remain in dialogue, in relationship, in community. That's the peace that is the promise of resurrection. Peace be with you.

And you know what? That peace is with you. Some translators actually give us this phrase in the sense of peace IS with you. Your ability to experience right relationship and life-giving community is already within you; it's part of you. This peace that passes understanding is a fruit of the spirit

that enlivens you, a gift of the God in whose image you have been made. This peace, this healing energy that is equal to any circumstance or situation, is with you. That is very good news when we are trapped behind the locked doors of fear, regret or indecision. How we need to hear the Christ Presence within us remind us that Peace IS with us! It is accessible. It doesn't mean the problems go away, but it does mean that we can be lifted up, raised up, resurrected, so that we can face the problems and experience hope and meaning no matter how long it takes for the problem to be solved. Peace is with you.

Here's another exciting and all too often overlooked point of this resurrection narrative. It doesn't point to itself. It isn't about proving a doctrine, dogma, or justifying an opinion or belief. Jesus is said to return to these fearful, hurting disciples offering peace...he comes to them to offer them strength, encouragement, AND challenge. The resurrection is THEIR experience meant to bring THEM healing and PURPOSE.

Jesus breathes on them and gives them a directive. The biblical word for breath is the same word for spirit...and we see Jesus breathing on the disciples, sharing breath with them, saying "Receive the holy breath...the breath of life, the breath of empowerment, the breath of rejuvenation, the breath of wholeness...the holy breath, or holy Spirit." Receive the energy of life, the power of life...receive indomitable hope, the strength that comes from the source of peace. Breathe in and know your sacred value, and then act as if you know it.

"As the Eternal has sent me, I am sending you." Breathe in...remember your sacred value, and get to work. Yes, it's scary out there...I'm sending you anyway. It isn't safe; it isn't comfortable. Not everyone will like what you stand for; not everyone will like what you have to say. I'm sending you anyway. You'll shake things up, make people uncomfortable, you'll both comfort the afflicted AND afflict the comfortable...it might get you in trouble. I'm sending you anyway. Speak truth to power...some won't want to hear it. They won't want to hear about justice, inclusion, the truth of God's love that leaves no one out for any reason...some won't want to sacrifice their comfort to include more people who still need healing for their wounded spirits...I'm sending you anyway. God sent me and it led me to Golgotha. But the Breath of Life that animated me now animates you...Breathe it in, and go and be Christ in the world. Be the hands of God, be the face of God, be the incarnation of God as I have been. God sent me, I'm sending you. Receive the holy Spirit!"

This resurrection for these disciples isn't about them hearing Jesus' voice or seeing his face again for a minute; it's that they are being called to remember who they really are and then to go out and make a difference. There would be very little risk in whispering to your friends, "I don't think Jesus stayed dead." But it's something else entirely to hear, "The living Christ within me has called me to continue Jesus' work of loving the unlovables, touching the untouchables, remembering the forgotten, demanding justice for the oppressed, and proclaiming hope and good news to the people who have been left out, wounded, or marginalized." Resurrection doesn't call us to affirm something in the distant past; it calls us to live in its power here and now...it sends us out to keep the work alive. That can't be scary. Jesus says, "I'm sending you anyway."

And here we are, celebrating the Resurrection still. That means not simply whispering to those who agree with us that it did happen, but boldly challenging the world with the message that it DOES happen! The Spirit of Life still flows through us, lifting us up, affirming our sacred value, and sends us out to bring peace and hope and encouragement to the people who need it most. The Eternal sent Jesus and by the power of the Spirit, we are sent too. And as we answer the call, we share in the power of Resurrection. We get what we give; we are lifted up as we raise up others. We have as much hope as we share; sow the seeds of abundant life for all, and we reap a Resurrection Harvest in our own lives.

And what about those people who would rather we just shut up? Jesus says, "let that go." Forgive them...release the past to the past; release your enemies to their highest good. If you hold on to that it weighs you down; if you let it go, you are free to move forward and to answer your divine calling. If your friends don't have to agree with you, certainly your enemies don't! So let it

go...forgive, release, and keep moving forward. Be the light of Resurrection for those who still so desperately need such hope.

Peace is with you...you can work together, remain in relationship even when it is difficult, even when you don't see eye to eye, and by doing so you will continue to enjoy the blessing of community.

Breathe in the power of Life that continually raises up prophetic voices calling for justice, healing, and positive change. Receive the spirit and be empowered to continue the work of Christ in the world.

And all those who would oppose this divine mission...release all that. Wish them joy and move on. Don't let them keep you from being all you are meant to be and from doing all that you are called to do. It may not be easy, but it is the way to self-realization, empowerment, and joy. The Resurrection continues, and with it we are reminded of the Resurrection in our own lives, and we are challenged to embrace that power and use it to continue ushering in the dominion of God for ALL people.

This is the good news.

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***Resurrection continues.
Resurrection Power blesses my mind.
Resurrection Power blesses my body.
Resurrection Power blesses my relationships.
Resurrection Power blesses my loved ones.
Resurrection Power flows through me...
To bless the whole world.
And so it is!***

"Stand up to your obstacles and do something about them. You will find that they haven't half the strength you think they have." Norman Vincent Peale