

A Sermon for DaySpring

by Eric Howell

Practicing Resurrection

Luke 24:36-48

April 18, 2021

The Easter season is the part of the church year when more than ever we focus on the resurrection of Christ. Right in the face of the violence of the world, in the ongoing challenges of this year in particular, and through concerns carried so close to home—right in the midst of all of this, we still celebrate Easter, when Christ emerged from the tomb and conquered death.

On Easter morning, as the sun rose over the trees we proclaimed, “Christ is risen indeed” and as the baptismal waters opened, closed and opened again over a child of God, we said, “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . crucified, died, and buried, on the on the third day he rose again.”

One of my favorite moments from Easter morning was from the end of the sunrise service. It was still half-light when we finished, coming to the climactic moment when we say, “Christ is risen.” The service had been simple and quiet leading up to that moment. The silhouettes who came down the hill to the tree gathered mostly in reverent silence. The music was quiet, reflective. Everyone sat quietly while I spoke a few minutes about Easter morning and the hope of new life. We were all standing as I moved over beside the end of the front row and said the prompt, “Christ is risen.”

I admit, I was startled at the enthusiasm of the reply. I think everyone who came, came to say those words and had been waiting like winter for the spring of their faith to begin again. “Christ is risen,” I said. The response shook the ground. “Christ is risen, indeed!” I was particularly moved by the voice right next to me. I admit I still don’t know who it was. A young girl, perhaps a teenager, or college student judging by the voice. I was startled, touched by the conviction in her voice. This was not sleepy repetition of a line in a worship guide. Hers was proclamation: “Christ is risen indeed!” She believed it. I couldn’t make out a face, but I haven’t forgotten the voice. We proclaimed with confidence. We celebrated with joy.

Of course, that was two whole weeks ago. A lot of life can happen in two weeks. What about now? We may ask what now? What of resurrection? What of our life and our life together in the echoes of Easter morning?

The Gospel reading for today opens with, “As they were talking about these things...” As they, the disciples of Jesus, were talking about rumors of resurrection appearances and the evidence of the empty tomb, as they were talking about these things, the story opens. Talking about things just seems something a lot less than singing about them or proclaiming them.

Talking about things. While they were talking, Jesus appeared among them and said, “Peace be with you,” which apparently accomplished anything but peace among them. They certainly were not immediately glowing with the joy of resurrection nor singing the confidence of victory over death. Words used to describe them are: startled, terrified, frightened, doubting. They looked like they’d just seen a ghost. And they thought they had.

When someone thinks they've seen a ghost, or a UFO, there always comes a reasonable explanation. But in the Gospel, when you think you've seen a ghost, the explanation is even more unreasonable. Here is no ghost visiting from beyond the grave. This is Christ resurrected, having conquered the grave.

Why do you look like you've just seen a ghost? It's me, look at my hands, my feet.

He showed them the hands they knew very well by this time: they'd seen those two hands gesture while he taught, the same hands that had washed their feet, broken bread and fish to feed thousands, and those feet they'd followed through the towns of Galilee, the feet that mounted the colt as they entered Jerusalem. The hands and feet bore the wounds of the nails. "It is I, myself," he assured them.

As Jesus does here, it is important for us to proclaim the resurrection as an interruption of God into the order of life and death. In the days following the crucifixion of Jesus, he appeared to many, and as he did, he was not a ghost, not a spirit, not a good idea or motivational memory; he was not a philosopher, or a program or a wish. His feet, his hands; resurrection is this mystery. Christ has died. Christ is raised from the dead. Indeed.

Christians proclaim the resurrection of Christ as the great hope of our faith. It's not just an expression of comfort as we look ahead to life after death. It is a full, divine affirmation of hands and feet and words and all creation, our created bodies, the lives we share with one another. Not even the darkness of a tomb can change it. Christ came into the darkness and the darkness has not overcome him. If in Christ there is new creation, his body is the new beginning; and this is God's way of saying it is all good. Even as creation bears the scars and wounds of human sin and so very many failures and fractures and rejection of God and God's goodness, the world God created and the body Christ incarnated are beautiful in divine eyes.

And so is your life. You are beautiful in divine eyes. If you don't feel that way at all some days, or some weeks or . . . ever; you are still so very beautiful. The darkness has come, but the darkness does not overcome. You are a child of the light, and you are because we proclaim the resurrection, and we practice resurrection.

In Portland, Oregon, a Franciscan brother works in a coffee shop encountering people every day from all walks of life and carrying life's burdens etched in their furrowed foreheads with them every morning. One day he says, "I had a customer comment on my tattoo. It is scrawled across the outside of my forearm in ornate script that reads 'Practice Resurrection.'"

The customer, as he grabbed his coffee off of the counter said, "What is that about?"

"It's the final line of a Wendell Berry poem."

"Yeah, but what does it mean?" the customer asked.

"I think we all have something to get up from," the brother replied.

<https://www.ssfamericas.org/post/practice-resurrection>

I think we all have something to get up from. Practice resurrection. The line comes from Wendell Berry's poem *Mad Farmer's Liberation Manifesto*, about living connected with the land

and disconnected from all the other things that manipulate us and diminish abundant life. In the poem, Barry writes about doing what is right and what will last into the future – even a future we won't see. "Plant sequoias."

He talks about caring for people beyond politics, breaking free from addiction to consumption, and living into the mystery of this one life we each have here with our brothers and sisters and all creation. He sums all of this up, all the various facets of living with the final line, "Practice Resurrection."

But I suppose all of that can sound a little ephemeral, a little intangible. Practicing resurrection for disciples of Jesus, for the church that lives on after them, thankfully begins with one of the most basic human acts that we can imagine performing: welcome a stranger and give them something to eat.

Jesus is not a ghost, but he fully embodies the role of perfect stranger when he comes among the disciples that day. He says to them, "Give me something to eat."

After showing his hands and feet to still bewildered disciples on whom the light of understanding is still only half-light, Jesus asks, "You got anything to eat around here?"

It's kind of a startling line. Resurrected people eat. I guess we didn't know that. Maybe he was hungry. Harrowing hell probably does make a fellow famished. Maybe he was looking for one more way to show them he was physical. Hands, feet not enough for you? Then how about teeth, tongue, esophagus, stomach.

But also, Jesus was showing us right there as the light began to dawn on the era of Easter for all creation and for all time that we practice resurrection by welcoming the stranger, by being open to God doing something new where we least expect it, looking for life to come from and empty tomb, like a sequoia sprouts from 2 inches of hummus, like new hope dawns from gnawing despair, like a person who gets out of bed and lives today and hasn't yet given up for one more day; or the one who prays without giving up for that person in their life who seems so lost they may never find life and light again.

It starts here. Give me something to eat. A community eating with Jesus and sharing table with one another as brothers and sisters and holy strangers is practicing resurrection.

We do so because everyone has something to get up from.
And you are the community whose mission it is to lift one another up
In your prayers and with your hands and your feet and your hearts and your minds
To be a people who proclaim and practice resurrection hope, resurrection love, resurrection faith, resurrection life.

Thanks be to God

