

Practicing Resurrection

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2nd Class

Introduction/Review: Looking at Lent as a Journey from Death to Life

The Season of Lent is often viewed as a journey in which we are saved from our sins. Last Sunday, we began Lent by revisiting Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and we were invited in the Collect for that day (the summary prayer at the beginning of the Liturgy) to recognize the "weaknesses of each of us." As we make our way in Lent, our collect trace out a particular path of transformation: penance (BCP Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent), renewal (BCP Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent), refreshment (BCP Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Lent), and grace (BCP Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent).

By doing so, our liturgies follow a well-worn path and assign to us traditional readings that have been followed for many years. The goal of these readings is to point us in the direction of the Atonement -- on what it takes for us to be made right with God, which Christians believe happened at the crucifixion, when Jesus died for our sins on the cross. On the cross, Jesus offered a sacrifice, or prayer, that we could not offer on our behalf so that we would find forgiveness for all the ways that we have been less than who God created us to be. On the cross, Jesus defeated the power of death, died for our sins, and showed us God's infinite love for us.

However, there is another way to go through Lent, I believe, which has been obscured by this familiar path. This way proceeds by looking at Jesus's journey to Jerusalem not as a walk from life to death, but as journey from death to life.

In this journey, the resurrection is not a reward or surprise-ending waiting to appear after Jesus has died, and all seems lost, but as a reality that begins to emerge as Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem. Therefore, Jesus is not so much walking to his death, but walking to his life. And this is good news for us, because in the process, Jesus is revealing to us what it means to live as if death were not. To say a bit more about some key Christian practices:

- **Loving:** This means that every moment that we love, our love goes with the grain of the universe. Our love is a participation in God's love. Every act of love is an expression of the love that is stronger than death.
- **Forgiving:** This means that we forgive not simply because Jesus has forgiven us, but because our forgiveness participates in God's infinite power to reconcile all things. Our forgiveness is the work of Christ's forgiveness in us, Christ's resurrection power in us.

- **Giving:** This means that when we give ourselves to others, we participate in what Christ is always already giving us. That is to say, Jesus's death on the cross does not exhaust all of what Christ has given to God, or sacrificed, on our behalf. Rather, Jesus is continuing to pour his sacrificial love on us and our world each day. As a result, when we give ourselves away, we are not losing ourselves but gaining ourselves.
- **Living:** This means that our life is found in the relationships we build rather than in the achievements we attain. It means that a central part of what it means to be a Christian is to learn how to die in order to learn how to live. It also means that in God's economy of grace, nothing is wasted. There is no excess or defect in what God has made. There is no moment or event that will not be reconciled and transformed by grace. Therefore, everything that happens to us not only happens for a reason, but we begin to practice the power of resurrection in our lives when we use the different ways that we have experienced death as a means to life.

II. Luke 23:33-49 – Dying to Live: Resurrection as Rebellion

Tonight we will look at Luke's portrayal of Jesus' last moments on Good Friday:

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' ⁴²Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' ⁴³He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

⁴⁴It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' ⁴⁸And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

III. Two Themes: It is possible to see in this passage two major themes

- a. There are at least three major losses suffered by Jesus as he is crucified:

Loss of Dignity: “they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. . .

Loss of Possessions: “And they cast lots to divide his clothing. . . .

Loss of Honor: ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ . . .

- b. At the same time, these three losses are counteracted by three positive gains

Gain of Forgiveness: “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’

Gain of Paradise: ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

Gain of Throne: There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ . . . ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ . . . ‘Certainly this man was innocent.

These two themes interact with each other throughout the passage, and they are placed side by side to force readers to make a decision. To follow Jesus means that we will often encounter these three losses, which culminate in death. However, at the same time, to follow Jesus also means that we will experience profoundly the three gains mentioned, which culminate in life and resurrection.

IV. Two Standards

In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius offers us “A Meditation on the Two Standards.”

(What do we mean by “standard? Ignatius was a soldier. When we say “standard,” think of a flag one carries into battle representing the side for which one fights. At critical points in a battle, particularly when, as in Ignatius’ time, armies did not wear uniforms, the armies of each side would get mixed together and confused. They would then have to rally around the flag of the side they are on.)

We are encouraged to meditate on which standard we carry throughout the nitty-gritty daily struggles — and to recognize how our choice of standards impacts the trajectory of our life.

The standard of the Enemy embodies living in such a way as to minimize any loss of dignity, possessions, or honor. We put ourselves first; we seek that which strokes our ego

and makes us powerful and wealthy. Our attention is focused on our own good, and we push aside God and neighbor.

The Standard that Christ carries embodies dying to self in order to live the life of God. We do this accepting Christ's forgiveness, his promise of paradise, and making him our king. We do this by reminding ourselves that all we have is a gift from God. The greatest gifts God gives us is the gift of Christ's forgiveness and the gift of himself in dying for us. We are called to empty ourselves of pride, greed and the pursuit of power in favor of making room in our hearts and in our world for meeting the needs of others, as Christ did on the cross and throughout his life.

Some questions for discussion:

Is it helpful to see our world from the perspective of these two standards?

Does our choice for Christ need to be "either/or" or "both/and"?

What in our culture keeps us from seeing these two standards clearly in our lives?

What would it mean for us to let go of the things that prevent us from living according to the standard of Christ?

As a way of moving toward the standard of Christ, what gifts are we most grateful for? When has the forgiveness of Christ mattered most to us in our lives?

What room do we have to make in our lives so that the "Paradise" of Resurrection might begin "today"?

V. Poetry

"They Have Threatened Us With Resurrection" (1980)

by Julia Esquivel de Valesquez

(translation from Spanish by Ann Woehrle)

It isn't the noise in the streets
that keeps us from resting, my friend,
nor is it the shouts of the young people
coming out drunk from the "St. Pauli,"
nor is it the tumult of those who pass by excitedly
on their way to the mountains.
It is something within us that doesn't let us sleep,
that doesn't let us rest,

that won't stop pounding
 deep inside,
 it is the silent, warm weeping
 of Indian women without their husbands,
 it is the sad gaze of the children
 fixed somewhere beyond memory,
 precious in our eyes
 which during sleep,
 though closed, keep watch,
 systole,
 diastole,
 awake.

Now six have left us,
 and nine in Rabinal,*
 and two, plus two, plus two,
 and ten, a hundred, a thousand,
 a whole army
 witness to our pain,
 our fear,
 our courage,
 our hope!
 What keeps us from sleeping
 is that they have threatened us with Resurrection!
 Because every evening
 though weary of killings,
 an endless inventory since 1954,**
 yet we go on loving life
 and do not accept their death!

They have threatened us with Resurrection
 Because we have felt their inert bodies,
 and their souls penetrated ours
 doubly fortified,
 because in this marathon of Hope,
 there are always others to relieve us
 who carry the strength
 to reach the finish line
 which lies beyond death.

They have threatened us with Resurrection
 because they will not be able to take away from us
 their bodies,
 their souls,
 their strength,
 their spirit,
 nor even their death
 and least of all their life.
 Because they live
 today, tomorrow, and always
 in the streets baptized with their blood,
 in the air that absorbed their cry,

in the jungle that hid their shadows,
 in the river that gathered up their laughter,
 in the ocean that holds their secrets,
 in the craters of the volcanoes,
 Pyramids of the New Day,
 which swallowed up their ashes.
 They have threatened us with Resurrection
 because they are more alive than ever before,
 because they transform our agonies
 and fertilize our struggle,
 because they pick us up when we fall,
 because they loom like giants
 before the crazed gorillas' fear.

They have threatened us with Resurrection,
 because they do not know life (poor things!).

That is the whirlwind
 which does not let us sleep,
 the reason why sleeping, we keep watch,
 and awake, we dream.

No, its not the street noises,
 nor the shouts from the drunks in the "St. Pauli,"
 nor the noise from the fans at the ball park.
 It is the internal cyclone of kaleidoscopic struggle
 which will heal that wound of the quetzal***
 fallen in Ixcán,
 it is the earthquake soon to come
 that will shake the world
 and put everything in its place.

No, brother,
 it is not the noise in the streets
 which does not let us sleep.

Join us in this vigil
 and you will know what it is to dream!
 Then you will know how marvelous it is
 to live threatened with Resurrection!

To dream awake,
 to keep watch asleep,
 to live while dying,
 and to know ourselves already
 resurrected!

* Rabinal is a town in the Guatemala province of Baja Verapaz where a massacre against indigenous people took place, perpetrated by the military dictatorship.

** The phrase “inventory since 1954” refers to the year in which the Guatemala government of President Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown by a CIA-backed mercenary army coup, which initiated the unrelenting and ever-mounting repression by the military regimes who took over power.

*** The quetzal is a beautiful bird found in the forests and woodlands of Central America. The name is from Nahuatlquetzalli, which means “large brilliant tail feather.” The quetzal is the national bird of Guatemala and figures in the oral traditions of the indigenous people of that area.

Image: The Black Christ of Alabama (1963) John Petts

