

Practicing Resurrection

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3rd 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.

I. Opening Meditation

Broken Bodies Rise

God is with us.

Our Lord has not forsaken or forgotten us.

Yes, we are living in an unprecedented time.

Yes, the next few months will be extraordinarily challenging.

Yes, we will learn to find God in moments of profound silence and solitude.

Yes, we will learn to feel God through different forms of connection and community.

Yes, we will have to learn new ways to be the church.

Through it all, we will find a way to trust in a Risen Jesus and depend upon his Word.

In it all, we will have to listen for the Holy Spirit's presence in us and between us.

We will adapt to these new realities because God is the ground of all reality.

We will live through this time because God is the creator and redeemer of time.

We will live through whatever happens, because Christ has defeated sin, death, and the grave.

Our Lent is ending soon.

Easter is coming, whether we hear brass and timpani or not.

We will discover new gifts and hear new music.

That is how Resurrection works.

Awkwardly, our bodies will adjust to new rhythms.

That is what Resurrection looks like.

God will surprise us with grace we did not know we had.

That is what Resurrection feels like.

God will comfort us as we let go of things we have come to love.

Because we now live as if death were not.

God will reveal to us, as if for the first time,

What it means to worship a living God.

Because Christ lives in us.

II. Mark 15:37-16:8 – Resurrection as the Absent Presence of Christ

Tonight we will look at Mark's portrayal of Jesus' Resurrection:

³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he^h breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"^h

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger, and Salome. ⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body,^h wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the

first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.^[a]

III. An (Im-)perfect Ending: The Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark

Mark is the first and briefest Gospel. More than any other Gospel in the New Testament, we find in the Gospel of Mark the roots of these stories of Jesus as oral tradition. That is to say, in Mark, we can see the rhythms and power that comes when a text is not merely read but recited.

This power of performativity is particularly present in Mark’s account of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Let me Begin with the ending or seeming lack thereof. The original ending to mark ends where I have just ended with the women ignoring the angelic proclamation and fleeing in terror. Only later, a few hundred years later, do we find any further writing about the Resurrection. Even the most orthodox and conservative Christians have acknowledged this.

Now, there is no doubt that Mark believed that Jesus’ actual tomb was empty and that, whatever else we might say about it, the resurrection was “physical,” an event that happened in time and space.

What we have to ask is, then, why does Mark end with terror? My favorite interpreter of Mark is Christopher Bryan, and those who are followers of his work will note that I am already drawing upon an important text he wrote (Preface to Mark, 1993).

Bryan argues that mark ends this way because the perfectly told story leaves you with an ending you infer yourself, that you imagine yourself. A Rhetorician named Demetrius, who wrote sometime before or after the first century, AD, wrote the following, “not every point should be punctiliously treated with full details, but some should be left for the hearers to comprehend and infer for themselves” (Bryan, Preface 121).

By stating things as he does, Mark is providing his readers with the opportunity to draw their own conclusion: The angel who testified to the women is testifying to us. What do we make of

his words? What kind of terror – the fear of the unknown – shakes us when we think of Jesus raised from the dead?

Another fold in this is that, for Mark, the purpose for this ending is to focus not on the past but the present. This is most evident in the way that the resurrection is literally implanted in the mind the moment we read the ending. This is the power of the art of inference. If we come up with the answer ourselves, it truly becomes ours.

And this is why the Gospel of Mark is so powerful. Mark's concern is not on the resurrection as an historical event as much as he is focused on it as a present reality.

These marks of an oral tradition are also found in the interweaving between this passage and earlier passages in the Gospel of Mark. This is seen, most immediately, in the tension between an earlier revelation at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9) and Mark's portrayal of the Resurrection. At the end of the Transfiguration in Mark, we read "As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (9:9). This is fulfilled in the final proclamation: "But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him" (16:6).

Finally, there is an interesting balance between Mark's depiction of the Baptism of Jesus and his death and resurrection.

Mark writes about Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11):

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

These elements recur in Mark's account of Jesus's Death and Resurrection. Just as the "heavens" are "torn apart" at Jesus' baptism, so at his death, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." At his Baptism, a voice comes from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," so at his death, a voice comes from the Centurion, who says, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Some people prefer more obviously powerful revelations of the Resurrected Jesus in the Gospel, such as the moment in the Gospel of John when Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds and believe. However, Mark's resurrection has a power all on its own.

The Resurrection is what we make of it. It is a moment of awe that occurs to us as a thought that wakes us up in the middle of the night. It is a revelation of God as *mysterium tremendum*, a God who not only comes close to us but fills us with awe.

V. Art

Pyx with the Women at Christ's Tomb 500s, Byzantine



Plaque with the Holy Women at the Sepulchre, early 10th century, North Italian



“Mary Magdalene” Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo (1535-40)



“Les saintes femmes au tombeau” (Three Holy Women at the Tomb) modeled 1896, carved before 1918, George Minne



“Untitled” Cy Twombly, 1997

