

Fourth Sunday of Easter, C
Acts 9:36-43
Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30

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How do we live as resurrection people? That's the question for these seven weeks of the Easter season. It's beautiful that Jesus rose from the dead, yet we can't help but ask, how does the Resurrection influence us today? How can Easter be something more than a great event that happened two thousand years ago?

Reflecting deeply this week, it seems to me that Easter is a style of life – Easter people have certain ways of acting and interacting, practicing compassion and forgiveness, working for justice, living generously and caring for God's earth, imitating our Risen Lord. Easter is also a stance of spirit – Easter people cultivate hope that's based in God's eternal love, which death can never destroy.

More than this, as people of Christ, Easter people, we practice resurrection. We watch for new life, we nurture new life, we trust that God is alive again and alive always, no matter what, so there is always a future of God's love and care that opens before us, whether we can envision that future or not. Every day we take a good look around us, we observe and notice what is before us, and even if it might look dead, we believe more is always happening through God's power. Resurrection life is always stirring somehow.

That's exactly what happened in the story of Tabitha, a gem from the book of Acts. Tabitha (you might know her by her Greek name, Dorcas) was a respected leader in the early church. She's the only person in the Bible called a *mathetria* – that is, a female disciple. She was known for good works and charity, which literally means “providing necessities for the poor,” especially widows, the poorest of all. Tabitha sewed clothes to give away, she was a beloved pillar of the church at Joppa, so much so that her death brought about a crisis.

The church sent urgently for Peter, we don't know exactly why. Maybe Tabitha was so important that Peter needed to know she had died. Or maybe they wanted Peter to pray with them, or help bury her. Maybe some hoped Peter could raise her from death, but most were already eulogizing Tabitha, taking stock of her legacy, holding up the handcrafted tunics and clothing she had made, as if to say: Look what beautiful gifts this woman leaves behind.

Anyone would call that house a place of death. But actually there was something more happening there, something nobody could yet perceive. God was working a resurrection. God was literally bringing Tabitha back to life.

This story brings a message for the Easter life we all share. Living the resurrection means learning that *even when something looks dead, there is always more going on, through God's living Spirit*. There is always some kind of life stirring, whether we can perceive it or not. And it's our Easter calling to get on board with that stirring life.

It's not a small thing, these days. I don't have to tell you that. *To live as resurrection people, watching for new life even when something looks dead.*

Coming out of this pandemic, we so much want it to be over, we so much want to bounce back to what we think of as normal. But nobody bounces back instantly, not from global trauma like this. People carry the trauma in their bodies – literally, hospitals are now filled with people whose health issues went unattended during the time of heavy Covid, especially our elders. People carry the trauma in their emotions – especially our youth -- one doctor told me they've never before needed to prescribe so much medication for depression and anxiety. People's finances are still traumatized, people losing their homes and bunking in with others, or out on the street. Our public life shows the effects of trauma – rage and backlash spilling over, and let's be aware that anger is often a sign of underlying distress: fear, anxiety, sadness, and grief. The effects are lingering in our families, in our community. It is going to take some time.

My friends, this is a season that requires holy patience and holy attentiveness and holy resilience, and these are gifts God is able to give us. We all have our down days. (Can I get a witness?) Days we are tempted to lose hope. *Days when things look dead. But as Easter people, we believe God is always at work in hidden ways.*

Let's remember, nobody heals instantly. A little over 5 weeks ago I fell when I was pruning a tree in our back yard, and I broke two ribs. Of course I googled it – how long does it take to get over broken ribs? The article I chose to believe said 4-6 weeks, so of course around the 4-week mark I became impatient. Why does it still hurt, why isn't my energy back all the way? Then my doctor set me straight – it takes 8 weeks till you even begin to feel good again. Bones heal slowly and invisibly, threads of bone cells grow together, crossing over from either side of the fracture line, gradually filling in the break, taking months to rebuild full strength. There is actually a whole lot of healing happening, even when you can't perceive it.

Nobody heals instantly. There are fractures in the human family that go back a long, long way, stubborn wounds of racism and sexism and homophobia and colonial

oppression and so much more. But the God of resurrection deeply loves this world, and God is always working for healing, even through us. God calls us Easter people *to watch for new life, even when something looks dead. And get on board with that new life. Lend our strength to resurrection.*

Father Richard Rohr advises:

"True spirituality is about keeping your heart space open. It is daily, constant work. The temptation is to close down: to judge and dismiss and hate and fear. If you don't have some spiritual practice that keeps your heart open, even in the midst of suffering and 'hell,' it's easy to end up grumpy and filled with fear and negativity. You have to work to live in love, to have a generosity of spirit, a readiness to smile, a willingness to serve. Regularly check in with yourself, asking, 'Is my heart open? Is love flowing from me? Or am I constricted?'"

- Father Richard Rohr

We ask God's help to keep hearts open. To see that every day we have the opportunity to experience and contribute to resurrection, in ways both small and great.

Today, on Mother's Day, we honor those women and female-identifying people who nurture resurrection life in a million different ways. We honor those who raised us up. We honor those who hoped to be biological or adoptive mothers but could not, finding other ways to share their creative and loving energies. We honor mothers who have endured grief and pain and sacrifice in loving their children. With acceptance, we consider how the mothers we know (ourselves included) have sometimes brilliantly lived their high calling and have other times fallen short – we are all so very human, we do our best and trust God's grace to cover our failings. We honor mothers who still live on this earth, and we honor mothers who have died and gone on beyond to join the saints around God's throne that the visionary language of Revelation describes so beautifully. Those who in the life to come have all their senses filled with God's goodness – eyes shining in God's light, ears filled with the music of the spheres, hunger and thirst satisfied in God's presence, never alone but in community with all the siblings God deeply loves, now and always.

We don't know if eternal life looks anything like that vision described in Revelation, but the feeling, the essence is true. And as I consider the saints in the great beyond, I can't help but think of those of us left behind, doing the important work of grieving. From our perspective, everything may look dead. But there is more happening than we can ever perceive, for our loved ones and for us. Resurrection is real, and we are Easter people.

A poet I've come to deeply appreciate is Steve Garness-Holmes. I will close with his poem entitled *Eternal Life*.

Eternal life isn't extended warranty,
it's not just prolonged survival;
it's God's life in you that never ends
even if you do,
it's your being part of the Body of Christ
which is eternal, even if your body isn't.
It's not about you,
not about getting to be an individual forever.
It's about sharing in God's love,
which will never perish.
When we live that love,
even though we die, yet shall we live.
In that love nothing,
nothing
can snatch us out of the Beloved's hands.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

"Eternal Life" by Steve Garnaas-Holmes *Unfolding Light* www.unfoldinglight.net
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