

Hungry for Resurrection

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:1-18

On the first day of the week, Mary goes to the tomb where Jesus had been laid; she's there to do what there hadn't been time to do Friday evening. Preparations had been hasty and incomplete; she couldn't bear the thought that Jesus might not be laid to rest with the proper preparations and rituals. But when she arrived, the stone had been moved. Her first thought was that someone might have desecrated the grave, and worse, stolen the body. The cloths in which they had wrapped the body are no longer with it; they're visible on the ground near the entrance to the tomb. Perhaps she fears

that someone may still be in there; rather than going in herself, she runs to get some of the other disciples.

Peter and John come running. John outruns Peter to the tomb, but he stops at the entrance. Peter barges on past him and enters the tomb. John follows him in; they see the wrappings. They didn't understand that Jesus was supposed to rise from the dead, but they see the evidence of his having risen, and they begin to entertain the possibility that something of cosmic importance may have happened here. They are hungry for resurrection.

Mary is distraught and perplexed. She weeps outside the tomb; she is overcome with grief. The possibility that the grave had been vandalized brings a fresh wave of grief, and she is inconsolable. When she looks into the tomb, she sees two angels sitting near where the body had been, and when they ask her why she's weeping, she apparently doesn't realize what she's seeing and with whom she is speaking. "They have taken away my Master," she says, "and I don't know where they have taken him." She is hungry for resurrection.

This is the most important event in the Christian tradition; this is what makes us who we are. This is the one thing that distinguishes our system of beliefs in a world full of systems of belief; Jesus, the son of God, has authority over death itself, and by overcoming it, makes it possible for the rest of us to find life. This is an event that happens outside the ordinary ways of thinking about time and space; it is an extraordinary, cosmic event, and like a giant rock thrown into a small pool, it has a ripple effect that goes far beyond just the life of Jesus on the earth.

The easy lesson, the obvious lesson, is that Jesus has conquered death, so we don't have to be afraid of it either; the apostle Paul famously asks, "Death, where is thy victory; O Death, where is thy sting?" We trust that there is something more,

something better, something indescribably wonderful to look forward to when our lives have fulfilled their allotted time. We have hope that there is something more to life than what we can see and experience in the time we're on earth; we find strength in the very thought of it.

There's more to it, though. No matter how deeply spiritual we may think we are, there's still the very important truth that our lives can be painful. Every human being experiences deep pain at some time or other. We lose people we care about. Our hopes and expectations dry up and blow away. The things we think are important often turn out to be just so much dust. Things we thought were trivial turn out to be things we wish we had paid more attention to. Human beings travel through a life that is full of disappointment and pain, whether they're rich or poor, tall or short, or healthy or sick. The pain may be less at some moments and greater at others, but it's part of our experience and it can't be avoided. Life can seem to be a series of high expectations followed by uncomfortable adjustments to reality. During those struggles, those moments of despair, we may become so caught up in our own emotions that we don't even notice that we, like the Disciples, like Mary Magdalene, are hungry for resurrection.

It is very important for us to understand that the resurrection of Jesus isn't only important because it gives us hope for life after death; it's important because it gives us hope for life during life. We are hungry for resurrection; not just in the last days, but during the course of our everyday lives, even when we think life is good and everything is going our way. Resurrection isn't something that happened thousands of years ago, only to affect what will happen in some unspecified time in the future; the resurrection of Jesus is a cosmic event whose ripples transcend time, and it makes a difference to what is happening at this very moment.

Resurrection happens when we allow the risen Christ to lead us to new places. The way we live, even as Christian people, can be quite zombie-like. We do things by rote; we do what we do without much enthusiasm. We suffer annoyances as though they were grievous wounds, and we withhold forgiveness even though, as I recently heard a pastor say, withholding forgiveness or carrying a grudge is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die. I could go on, but you get the idea: if the resurrection of Jesus is going to be meaningful, we're going to have to live in it, and it's going to have to be our resurrection, too.

Jesus rose from the dead. We, as believers in Jesus, share in that resurrection, even when we don't act like it. But there's something you should know about resurrection: once you have recognized it in your own life, it can become addictive. Resurrection tends to break bonds and to loosen chains; when we have shared in the resurrection of Christ, we begin to see possibility where before we might have only seen defeat. Where we used to see failure, we begin to see growth; where we used to see futility, we begin to see opportunity; where we used to see frustration, we begin to see miracles.

People who have risen from the dead don't soon forget. I'm not talking about near-death experiences, although I suppose it would also be true of them; I'm talking about those who pass through the difficulty and despair of life without losing the ability to search the horizon for new opportunity. We, the church, are a resurrected people, and we are a people committed to the idea that resurrection is not only possible, it is happening all around us, every day, whenever people are willing to die to self and live for Christ. Resurrection happens when we begin to see our own trials and tribulations as somehow less important than the activity of God all around us.

There are plenty of people, inside and outside of the walls of the church, who would give anything to be able to see the world like that. They're hungry for resurrection, but

they get stuck on the part that says they have to die before they can be raised from the dead. Or they get stuck on the part that says that after we've been raised from the dead, we try to listen obediently to God instead of doing what we might otherwise want to do. Amazingly, after the recent resurgence of militant atheism in some parts of society, the number of people who are interested in spiritual things remains very high. People answer surveys saying they believe in God, but they don't seem to know what to do with that idea. Human beings are hungry for resurrection, but they don't have any idea how to find it or where to look for it.

If those folks are ever going to understand resurrection, if they're ever going to know what it means to be raised from the dead, it's going to be because somebody who has had the experience is going to show them what it's like. It's going to be up to us to show them Jesus, and not by memorizing long speeches about him, but by living as though we believe Jesus is still alive. The ripples of that cosmic event continue to expand ever outward: Christ is risen; we are risen, too. And there's a community beyond our walls who would very much like to be raised from the dead. They're looking for someone to show them how it's done.