

## RESURRECTED FOR LIFE

John 11:17-44  
January 28, 2018  
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This first month of the year has been challenging. I don't recall a January where I have put so many hours into pastoral care, walking with folks through a variety of crises. It began shortly after retiring to bed from ringing in the New Year with a phone call informing us that Jan Walter had died. Since then we have prayed with people before surgery, talked with others making major transitions in their lives, and spent a lot of time at the hospital. After a week in which we've lost two people from this community of faith, and transitioned my mom to a new living arrangement, the energy level at our house is not high. There has been a strong awareness that the world is moving toward death.

I say this not to elicit sympathy, but to draw our attention to the context in today's story. It's vital that we understand that the gospel is spoken into the world of death, into the very crises of our lives. Scholars like to put a fancy explanation around it, but the important point is not why Jesus weeps, but that he weeps. He understands the grief of Mary and Martha, the confusion of the crowd, perhaps even the anger at his late arrival, and he shares their grief. This is the one who John tells us is the "word made flesh... the one who lives among us," the one who understands our griefs and sorrows.

But thankfully, he does not share our outlook. He never allows his spirit to be reduced by the consolation we sometimes find in the notion that "everybody dies." Into a community oriented (understandably so) toward death, Jesus declares: "I am the resurrection and the life."

The raising of Lazarus is the seventh sign that Jesus performs in John's gospel. It began with turning water into wine at a wedding. He also fed the multitude, walked on water, healed a man born blind, made a lame man walk and healed an official's son. These signs expressed Jesus' basic orientation toward life. The celebration of love is not allowed to be marred by the wedding couple's lack of resources to provide for their guests. The hungry are to be satisfied, lost abilities are restored, blindness is removed, and death does not have the final say. For Jesus, everything moves toward life.

But there's one more sign in the gospel. Rob Bell writes in his book, *Love Wins*,

"Jesus rises from the dead in a garden. Which, of course, takes us back to Genesis, to the first creation in a... garden." He goes on: "It's the eighth sign, the first day of the new week, the first day of the new creation, one free from death, and it is bursting forth in Jesus himself right here in the midst of the first creation. The tomb is empty, a new day is here, a new creation is here, everything has changed, death has been conquered, the old has gone, the new has come" (pp.133-4).

When Lazarus is called forth from the tomb, it is not with the understanding that he will die again. Jesus tells them to unbind Lazarus, to free him, because he is alive again. He is resurrected to a new life... as are all of us who follow Jesus.

It's so easy for us to lose what Eugene Peterson calls "resurrection wonder."

"...we do not live in a world that promotes or encourages wonder." he writes, "Wonder is natural and spontaneous to all of us. When we were children, we were in a constant state of wonder. The world was new, tumbling in on us in profusion. We staggered through each day fondling, looking, tasting. Words were wondrous. Running was wondrous. Touch, taste, sound were all wonders. We lived in a world of wonders."

"But gradually the sense of wonder gets squeezed out of us. There are many reasons, but mostly the lessening of wonder takes place as we develop in competence and gain mastery over ourselves and our coordination and environment" (p.31).

Peterson suggests that we lose wonder the more we rely on our own abilities. We lose the sense of mystery as walking across the room becomes routine, but we also lose that wonder as our own incompetence is exposed, as our failure to prevent the ills that come our way. We get stuck in a spring to winter world instead of the winter to spring world that Jesus offers.

Living in resurrection wonder is not an invitation to live in a Pollyannaish world, but to recognize the true nature of the universe as moving in the direction of life. I have met people in the past month whose friendship and laughter has buoyed the spirits of one seriously concerned about losing her mother. Tomorrow, while acknowledging the loss of a member of this household of faith, we will gather to celebrate her life. I have been privileged to serve a community of faith whose people stand with those in crisis. Even as my mom's health declines, I've seen the possibility of new life for both my parents through those committed to enriching life for those whose abilities are in serious decline.

I said to Janet on the phone as she was telling me about what was happening here: "We have good people here." You'll see that too as you read the annual report and as we talk about later the wondrous things that have taken place in the last year and the good things that we anticipate for the next year. Today we honor the lives that you have given for the health of this community of faith and in service to the world. We are oriented toward life because that is the nature of the world that God has created.

So listen to Rob Bell again. He writes about resurrection: "Because that's how the universe works. That's what Jesus does. Death and resurrection. Old life for new life; one passes away, the other comes. Friday, then Sunday. You die, and you're reborn. It's like that" (p.137).

The month is almost over and there are boxes scattered around waiting for us to finish putting the Christmas things away. Normally we'd be done with that, but it's been that

kind of month. So the Fontanini nativity is still up. I can sit in my chair and look across to the TV cabinet and see the stable with Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus with all the surrounding cast: magi and angels and ordinary people. And as my gaze drifts over to the mantle, there are three figures which have lifted my spirits this season: a girl dancing with tambourine, a woman playing the lyre, and a man playing the pipes. The trio have reminded me repeatedly of the joy which God desires for us and the life for which we were made.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Amen.

Rob Bell. *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person who ever Lived*. Harper Collins Publishers: New York, NY. 2011

Eugene H. Peterson. *Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life*. Navpress: Colorado Springs, CO. 2006.