

“WHERE JESUS LIVES”

Mark 16:1-8

April 4, 2021

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What does resurrection look like? In this second Easter of the pandemic, we are beginning to feel hopeful. The vaccination process is going well. We're worried that the numbers are climbing again, but as more and more of us become vaccinated, we anticipate a return to life. I don't say a return to normal, because what we've lost this past year is so much more than a ceasing of our normal activities. We've lost more than dining out, going to concerts, movies on the big screen, sharing drinks with friends, and an evening on the volleyball court. More than these things we've lost some of the most fundamental ways we have to express love and affection.

Outside of our little bubbles, we haven't shaken hands, exchanged hugs, or even offered smiles. The ministry of touch has gone on a very long vacation. For those who have lost loved ones, death has never seemed so isolating an experience. To hold the hand of a spouse in his or her final hours, to kiss the forehead of a parent on a respirator, even to offer an encouraging smile to a friend are basic intimacies that we've been denied. So as I hear about grandparents looking forward to hugging their grandchildren and children arranging to visit parents, I begin to feel as though a part of me is coming back to life.

What does resurrection look like after a pandemic? Does it look like friends sharing stories and food, and laughter at a restaurant? Does it look like a night at the symphony, a day at the ballgame, a playdate in the park? Will we see resurrection in the joy of a child's face grinning from ear to ear? Is it too trivial to speak of these things as a "rising from the dead?"

This would be a good time for resurrection. Our cornelian cherry bush is bursting forth with yellow buds. The crocuses have flowered in greater numbers than ever in our yard. The hellebores are blooming and the trillium is up. The early migrating birds are beginning to pass through on their journey north. The earth is waking up, urging us to entertain hope.

This is of course no time to ease up. Still averaging over 60,000 new cases a week, we still need to exercise caution. When we begin to gather in person, we still won't be seeing smiles, shaking hands, or embracing. We won't be grabbing coffee, a donut hole, and a bit of conversation after the service. It feels a little like a Markan Easter where the women come to the tomb, hear that Jesus is alive, but then flee in fear, keeping the news to themselves. Resurrection is in the air, but there are no resurrection appearances.

Some pastors don't preach Mark's version of the story. The lectionary always offers a reading from John as an alternative. If you have a choice about preaching a text where Jesus actually appears and one where his resurrection is only reported, the choice is not usually difficult. I still remember rewriting an Easter sermon from Mark's text in the wee

hours of a Sunday morning because I just couldn't get anything positive out of it on the first or second or third run-through. I don't think that's the last time I preached Mark's version, but it's the one I remember.

Probably for the first time in my preaching career, Mark actually feels appropriate. I feel a little like Mary, Mary, and Salome must have felt: having come to honor the dead, hearing the news of resurrection, and not quite believing it. What does resurrection look like in a pandemic? Well, we think we might almost be over it. We're hopeful... but we're still afraid. We're not quite sure what resurrection looks like.

This is where I and many preachers get in trouble. You can't end the story here. Easter is about hope not fear. It is about proclamation, not about silence. The question, "Where is the risen Christ?" just screams at us... and we have no answer. When will this end? When will death be swallowed up in victory? When will we be able to embrace one another again? I always believed that Mark leaves us hanging until I read an article by Tom Long in this year's Easter edition of the *Journal for Preachers*.

We're so drawn to the fear and silence of the women that we miss the message of the angel. "He is going ahead of you," says the messenger, "to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." "Where is the risen Christ?" asks Tom Long. "Precisely where he was the first time. Back at work, preaching, teaching, calling, healing, cleansing, feeding, challenging oppression, and casting out demons" (p.4).

We know that the fear and the silence of the women doesn't last. We know that they will return to Galilee with the other disciples where they will encounter Jesus back in the place it all began. Mark seems to be saying, "Go back to the beginning of my gospel and read it again, Read it with resurrection eyes."

Mark's gospel begins with Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, telling people that it has come near. This is how our life in Christ begins, with the reception of the good news that God has come near in Jesus. Immediately Jesus begins to call disciples. And so the crucified and risen one calls us. He heals, he preaches, he cleanses, he forgives. This is what the risen Christ does for us. All of the gospels present us with a Jesus who is already, before the cross, alive in a way that we are not. He is already showing us how to live the new life.

What does resurrection life look like? If you're not sure, if you're in a fearful place, read the gospel over again. Go back to the beginning when you first heard the good news. It looks just like that.

Resurrection is the acknowledgement by the community of faith of God's abiding love for the infant being baptized. Resurrection is the prayer we speak for the needs of the community and the world. Resurrection is forgiveness offered and received that restores a broken relationship. Resurrection is the welcome of a stranger in need of friends. It is feeding the hungry, advocating for justice, and ministering to the sick. Resurrection happens when a joint is replaced, a cataract removed, or a bone mended. Resurrection

occurs when a person accepts her status as a child of God, and learns to speak with her own unique voice. It occurs when a father values his relationship with his child over job advancement. Resurrection happens when music speaks to the soul and when a work of art speaks to the mind of God's beautiful creation. Resurrection is the community coming together after disaster, tragedy, or division.

Resurrection is reunion, renewal, reconciliation, restoration, and reparation; anywhere that life is made new, anywhere Jesus lives, anywhere we can say, "God is here."

Tom Long says, "We should look for the risen Christ ... especially in places where people suffer, where there is defeat, pain, and loss" (p. 4). Read any of the four gospels and you will see that these are the places where Jesus lived. They are the places where Jesus lives today. Resurrection Day, as I sometimes like to call it, isn't the day when everything starts to fall in place, when nothing ever goes wrong again. It's the day when we acknowledge that Jesus is alive even in the midst of grief, when the body falters, and when there is no peace. Resurrection Day reminds us that Jesus walked with us and *walks* with us. And Resurrection Day tells us that we are alive too... even in the midst of a pandemic.

Some of you have reported experiencing spiritual growth over the last year, maybe like nothing you've experienced before. You're more aware of God's presence, more sensitive to the needs of others. Prayer is coming alive for you. You know what resurrection looks like.

I had hoped that this would be the first Easter after pandemic. I had hoped that we would be gathered together singing the great Easter hymns, exchanging the peace and sitting down to an Easter brunch. I had hoped to see smiles, shake hands, and exchange hugs. When those things do come back, they will be important images of resurrection. It will feel like coming alive again. But resurrection happens wherever Jesus lives, and he is alive in this time. Every day is a day to practice resurrection, to live as Jesus lived before and after resurrection.

So go back to Galilee and follow Jesus through the gospel again, but this time with resurrection eyes. Go back to when you first received the good news, and walk with the living Christ once again. Go where Christ is, among those in need of care and hope. Christ is alive and there is work to do and a new life to live. Christ is risen! (*Christ is risen, indeed!*) And so are you! Thanks be to God. Amen.