

March 27, 2016
Easter Sunday Order of Service
“Practice Resurrection”

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- “Practice Resurrection” - Wendell Berry

*1st Hymn: **How Can I Keep From Singing, Green 245.***

Readings -- Peter Rollins, Joanna Macy, Eph. 1:18-19, John 20:18

*2nd Hymn **When Jesus Walked Upon the Earth, Green 107***

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief.

*3rd Hymn: **Lord of the Dance, Green 115, verses 1,3,5***

Message “Coming Back to Life”

Silent worship

*4th Hymn: **Praise and Honor Jesus’ Name, Green 118***

Closing -- May we practice resurrection.

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting

Good Morning Friends.

Almost two years ago, I brought some messages to this meeting inspired by Wendell Berry’s poem Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front. The ending

of that poem has been whispering to me for the last month, knowing that we would come here together on Easter. It ends with this two word command: “Practice Resurrection.” Practice Resurrection. As Easter approached, those words came to me again and again...getting into my car, putting my kids to bed, in the checkout aisle, at the library...watching spring move in increments over the landscape...practice resurrection.

On this Easter day, this celebration of resurrection, let us join our voices to those that call us back to life, again and again, with our first hymn, ***How Can I Keep From Singing, Green 245.***

Readings

Peter Rollins, Christian writer and speaker from Belfast, Northern Ireland

Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ...

I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system.

However there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have no voice, and when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed.

Ephesians 1:18-19

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which Christ has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

John 20:18 So Mary Magdalene (left the tomb and) went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.'

Joanna Macy, Buddhist Scholar and Deep Ecologist, whom I quoted on the 4th Sunday of Lent, from her readings on Positive Disintegration. This excerpt is from her book titled "Coming Back to Life."

We do not have to be particularly noble ... in order to wake up to the power of our connection with other beings. That simple awakening is the gift this planet-time

holds for us. For all their horror and stupidity, the very bombs and poisons and wreckage we create are also the manifestation of an awesome spiritual truth -- the truth about the hell we create for ourselves when we cease to learn how to love. Saints, mystics and prophets throughout the ages saw that law: now all can see it and none can escape its consequences...Perhaps we thought all along that Jesus was kidding, his teachings meant only for saints. But now we see, as an awful revelation, that we are all called to be saints -- not good necessarily, or pious, or devout -- but saints in the sense of just coming back to what connects us. Just caring for each other. In that...we can take heart. Even in confusion and fear, with all our fatigues and faults, we can let that awareness work in and through our lives...We can (learn) to see ourselves and each other with fresh eyes...Look at the next person you see. It may be a (spouse), child, coworker, bus driver, or someone you can barely stand. Regard him or her with the recognition that what keeps you alive, keeps that person alive, too. Come Back to That Life. The Good News is that you can do that any time. Again and again. You can come back to Life.

Message

For the last month, I've been listening to debates about the Resurrection of Jesus on youtube. During dinner preparations or doing dishes, dense theological arguments have been the background soundtrack of our family's life. And so one night, my seven year old son Cyrus lost his patience with the whole thing. Listening for a moment while I chopped vegetables, he grew indignant at the assertion that something miraculous and spectacular happened to the deceased body of Jesus, because so far as he was aware nothing of that sort has happened since then to anyone else. He seemed offended by the lack of repeated resurrections over the ensuing millennia, and exasperated with the suggestion that a one time, 2000 year old magic trick should be considered important to his life. He argued that the evidence is overwhelmingly against dead people coming back to life. "Why hasn't it happened since??" He demanded. "Why didn't Great-Papa come back to life??" He explained it all to me in a loud and affronted voice, and asked me if maybe he should speak to our family members for whom it's very important that Jesus's once dead body rose and lived again, to see if perhaps they just haven't considered it from his point of view yet.

I told him no, that we will respect the importance some of our family members place on the belief that Jesus was dead and then miraculously lived again, that there are many ways to think about it, and that's one shared by many people who celebrate with joy today, and anyway, I said, warming myself up for a theological lecture, we don't know for sure what did or didn't happen. Just because a thing is unlikely, I informed him, doesn't mean it's impossible, faith is about not knowing for sure, and besides, who wants to believe only in what's possible? That stopped him for a moment, as he turned that riddle around, and it gave me a second to say something about metaphors being the language we use to describe things we don't have words for. To which he looked skeptical and harumphed. And then George helpfully piped in from the living room: "Ask Mommy what Easter eggs and bunnies have to do with it all, Cyrus!"

And so our family muddled toward Easter. In a muddled world, all muddled together.

And the muddle was particularly muddy this week. The week that many Christians call Holy began with the bombing in Brussels. And then, the fear, the calls for retaliation, the uncertainty, the terrible pictures, the faces of shock and grief, the scrambling and unknowns, the rumors that ISIS will target nuclear reactors. For many people, for many parts of the web of life this Easter, it's Good Friday over and over again. We know all the statistics and the numbers, we can see the polarization, the violence, the mob mentality and the fear in our own country, the growing disunity, the alarming headlines of encroaching ecological calamity underlying everything, and it is all very grim. The pain and the death *are* all around us. We *do* need an Easter miracle.

The reading from Joanna Macy tells us that that pain we feel -- for the world, for all its beings, for one another -- arises out of love. Pain, she says, is the price of being connected to Life, and to Other Living Beings. What underlies our pain, our sorrow, even the fear we feel in response to the myriad crises we are facing as a planet and as a species, is our profound connection with one another, our connection with All That Is, with All That Lives With Us, and our belonging to the communion of Creation. If we are wounded by what it takes to live on Earth right now, it is *because* we love. We love others, we love our home, we love our own lives, we love Life Itself. The paradox is that it is through this love, though wounded, that we are sustained and transformed, connected with our source, our Beloved, our heart, our soul, our Being, our God, our Christ. Sometimes in our greatest pain there is the greatest love, and the greatest Aliveness, one that Lives even in Death. And that's the resurrection. That's the story of Easter. That's what Jesus did: he lived, and he died in love. In God. In That Which Rises. In That Which Comes again and again back to its belonging to all of life.

And that is what we do, when we practice resurrection, in the small and large ways we are called to love in our daily lives. We Come Back to Life. We resurrect and raise the Christ that lives in and through us. We look with the eyes of our heart. And sometimes, others meet our gaze. And then we realize, again, that our strength and our sustenance and our substance come from our deep ecology, our common belonging. The Easter moment, the resurrection moment, the saving moment is the Love of the One for the many, and the Love of the many for the One to which we all belong.

And this is spiritual, but, as Peter Rollins testifies in his words about denying and affirming the resurrection, it's also *political*. Because the execution of Jesus was political: he was killed by the most brutal and humiliating means available by an occupying force and its agents. Because he threatened the social order that benefited a very few. Stories of the **resurrection** of the Crucified Jesus are a **defiant vindication** of his life and his ministry. The man who was raised -- who was lifted up -- was a convicted outlaw, a troublemaker, a poor man, a forsaken prophet, a blasphemer. Rejected, mocked, condemned, and publicly executed, he was dangerous to the domination system. Whatever else we may believe about it, the crucifixion was an act of political violence. To the early apostles the resurrection was both spiritual *and* political, and this is the way that the word *believe* is used in the passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. ***I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which Christ has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power, for us who believe.*** The original Greek word meant *to engage, with love. to commit with your whole being*. Through translations from Greek to Latin and in the evolution of its English meanings, *believe* came to mean an intellectual assent to a hypothetical and often dubious proposition, but in the original Greek it meant to set one's life and energy and heart behind someone or something. And that someone and something was the ministry and mission of Jesus of Nazareth, nonviolent nonconformist and lover of outcasts, who broke bread with the unclean and unsanctioned --and Who Yet Lives, Who is Risen, Who Walks Among Us, who is loose in the world. The Living Christ. Commitment to that kind of Lord doesn't come without cost, or pain, or suffering. It doesn't come without practice. We will have to learn how to look at brutality and see the love answering it. How to look at death and see a life set free to dwell everywhere, in everyone. How to look at vagabonds and sinners, lepers and prostitutes, refugees and orphans and the stepped over and stepped on and say, I Have Seen The Lord.

Today, every day, every Easter, the resurrection mystery expresses our deepest, best, most fervent hopes, that the brutality we are capable of will not have the last word, that our capacity to destroy will be answered by a power that inverts our worst, transmutes our ugliest, and meets it all with love. Believing in the power of

Resurrection is believing that love can transform us, that maybe the impossible is possible. Being willing to bear the wounds of love, of connection with Life, we are raised again and again by that very Love.

That's how we practice resurrection. Every time we love someone who is difficult to love, every time we bless the meek, every time we love this bruised and sometimes frighteningly ugly world, every time we serve what is broken or disregarded, every time we mourn the deaths of invisible children we do not know, every time we take joy in simple things and see beauty others do not, every time we do not take our lives and the lives of others for granted, every time we are defiant in our gratitude and bow to the mystery, every time we carve out some small place in which we refuse to be commodified and marketed to or see others as commodities to be exploited, we are practicing resurrection. While those who study such things argue over mechanics and miracles and meaning of a Man of God coming back to life in the first century, in the 21st century the whole of the earth calls for the People of God to come back to life. Come back to belonging in the web of life...come back to the life that lives in us, through us, with us...to remember ourselves as members of One Body, the resurrected Body of Christ.

So Mary Magdalene left the tomb, and went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.'

Prayer

Oh God of the lilies, God of the green blade rising again from the dark earth, it is Easter once again. We stand once more at the open tomb, the stone rolled away, the burial cloths cast aside. We are worn and spent and sorrowed and dumbfounded and awestruck and daring to believe that maybe, maybe the impossible might be possible. Oh God who is wounded with us, God who bears the wounds of love, let what wounds us give us strength. Let the eyes of our hearts be opened, let us come back to life, to the miracle that lives in us and through us and with us. Let us live like Jesus, daring to love greatly what is small and meek. Daring to see what is easy to miss. That the miracle of Life and Living might pluck us from what entombs us. Holy God, Great Mystery -- Who cracks open the heart of death and gives us life, raise us this day. Lord, We believe. Help thou our unbelief. We pray today to rise, and to walk with you. Amen.

Benediction

Roll Back the Stone, Friends. Come Back to Life. Look with the eyes of the heart. See the Lord.

May we Dare to be Wounded by Love .

May we unearth what lives.

May we Believe.

May we Practice Resurrection. Again and again.