

Resurrection Life: The Gift Jesus Shares with Us

The following sermon was preached on Easter Day 2006 by the Rev. Richard H. Winters, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Indianapolis.

Will Willimon, until recently the Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, tells in one of his books about the visit of a well-known (at the time) Christian thinker and social critic--Carlisle Marney--to Willimon's college when he was a 19-year-old sophomore. There was a lecture followed by a question and answer time. One of the students asked this of Carlisle Marney: "Sir, let us hear you say a word or two about the resurrection of the dead." Marney thought a moment and said: "I will not discuss that with people like you." "Why not?" the group of sophomores shot back. "I don't discuss such matters with anyone under thirty." Then he explained: "Look at you, you're in your prime of life; never have you known an honest-to-God failure, heartache, solid defeat, or mortality. So what in God's name can you know of a dark world which only makes sense if Christ is raised?"

Well, I think Carlisle Marney was both right and wrong. I think he was wrong that people under 30--even 19-year-old college students--cannot have known defeat and failure and heartache. Of course they can, and frequently do (I wonder what planet he was living on!): young adults as well as youth and children can know the disappointment of failure, the estrangement of a broken home, and the rejection and cruelty which human relationships can bring us.

But I think Marney was right that the reality of resurrection life which God offers us in the Risen and Living Jesus only has meaning and power for us when we have known failure and disappointment and heartache. For the rare person who has never come face to face with despair--and I doubt such a person exists--or for the not-so-rare person who chooses to deny the pain and brokenness in their lives, Easter might as well be relegated to a cultural holiday that ushers in spring. But for the person who wonders why bad things happen to them and to others; for the person who asks out of boredom, dissatisfaction, or pain: "is this all there is to life?" the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection hope he unleashed into the world can mean all the difference--between despair and hope, between darkness and light, between futility and meaning, between a life of self-centeredness and one of self-giving service, between brokenness and the healing of a broken heart.

This explains, I think, why Jesus, after he was raised from the dead, did not make a grand appearance before the forces that had him put to death--Pilate and the Roman soldiers, Caiaphas and the other jealous religious leaders. No--he only appeared to those who had accepted the pain and heartache of life and who had been touched by the power of God in Jesus to heal them.

It's why all the gospel accounts tell us the first person Jesus appeared to was Mary Magdalene. She was someone Carlisle Marney would talk to, regardless of her age. She knew honest-to-God failure. She knew brokenness. She knew heartache and the loss of love. And she knew what it was like to live in the chaos of a confusing and cruel, ambiguous world.

And, therefore, she was open for the glory and power of God to change her life and to lift her from despair into the Resurrection of Jesus, her Lord and friend. "He has

been raised," said the young man in the tomb (the angel) "he is not here," words affirming the love of the Father for his Son and words of hope to a brokenhearted woman.

And Mary Magdalene was ready to hear the tremendous news that she and the disciples could and would share in the Resurrection of Jesus. "[G]o," she was told, "tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

Galilee for Mary and the other women and the disciples was their home, the place where they were from; their daily lives. And that is the place Jesus chose to reveal himself to them; precisely as it is the place where Jesus reveals himself to us, in our Galilee--our daily life of home, neighborhood, work, and faith community. Jesus is there, alive and present, to all who are open to receive a word of hope, all who have cultivated God's loving presence in their lives.

So the Easter question, to my mind, is not whether you and I believe Jesus rose from the dead, but rather if you do, **do you share in that resurrection life and power?** Because that's what God wants for you. God wants you to know that Jesus' resurrection means that God cares about your world, your Galilee, your life. God wants you to know that the Risen and Ascended Jesus, as the scripture says, has filled all things with his presence. Jesus the Christ is now an all-encompassing Reality. God wants you to know that God's goodness and grace is there for you every moment of your living.

That's the Easter Question: **Do you share in Jesus' resurrection life and power?** Now if you cannot honestly say "yes" to that question, but you sense you want to, I have two things to suggest.

First, you probably have experienced Jesus' life and power many times already; it's just that you didn't know it at the time:

--the friend of a friend who out of the blue got you that new job which changed your life; that person was Jesus for you.

--your sponsor in recovery, the power of the group to help return you to sanity; that person was Jesus for you; that was resurrection life for you.

--the first time someone loved you, not because they were supposed to but because they loved you for who you are; that person was Jesus for you.

--the persons who nurtured your faith over the years, protected you from danger, lifted your spirits, shared your joy and dreams, they were Jesus for you.

--the refreshment and renewal you receive from the beauty of creation, the thrill of sport, the companionship of animals, these are all ways in which Jesus' presence and power is made manifest to you.

--And his resurrection power made your life fresh all over again, whether you knew it then or not.

The second thing I would say to those who aren't sure they have experienced Jesus' resurrection life and power, but want to, is that the sense of Christ's all encompassing presence doesn't come automatically. It must be cultivated, and we are responsible for that.

If we are to recognize Jesus in creation, in friend and stranger, in our past and present, then we must know what he is like. So we turn to the scriptures, which tell us about Jesus' compassion, his healing power, and his intimacy with God the Father that he

wants us to have as well. There is no substitute for knowing the biblical accounts of Jesus.

The sense of Jesus' presence is cultivated also by the experience of him in Christian community, for Jesus said "where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in the midst of them." We meet Jesus in our fellowship, in reaching out to the community, in our working together to alleviate the suffering of others. We meet Jesus at the Holy Table. We meet Jesus when we hear each other's stories and how we have known Jesus' power to change us and help us.

And, finally, the sense of Jesus' presence is cultivated by our making room for him in the quiet of our hearts, in the quiet of prayer.

As I said, the sense of Jesus' presence, for most of us, doesn't come automatically. You have to decide to cultivate it; to choose to dig deep into the scriptures; to choose to be an active member of a Christian community; to choose to acknowledge your need for hope and healing and meaning in life.

And when you do, Jesus will be there for you. For Jesus is going ahead of you to your Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you. *Amen.*