

Scripture Reading
John 20: 1-18

Easter

Frederick Buechner writes “It has always struck me as remarkable that when the writers of the four Gospels come to the most important part of the story they have to tell, they tell it in whispers. The part I mean, of course, is the part about the resurrection. The Jesus who was dead is not dead anymore. He has risen. He is here. According to the Gospels there was no choir of angels to proclaim it. There was no sudden explosion of light in the sky. Not a single soul was around to see it happen. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb afterward, she thought at first that it must be a gardener standing there in the shadows, and when she saw who it really was and tried to embrace him, he told her not to, as if for fear that once she had him in her arms she would never let him go, the way I suspect that if you and I were ever to have him in our arms, we would never let him go either. When the disciples heard he was alive again, they tended to dismiss it as too good to be true, and even when they finally saw him for themselves, Thomas still wasn't convinced until Jesus let him touch his wounds with his own hands. Later on, when they were out fishing at daybreak, they saw him standing on the beach, and there again they failed to recognize him until he asked them to come join him at the charcoal fire he had started on the sand and cooked them breakfast.

The way the Gospel writers tell it, in other words, Jesus came back from death not in a blaze of glory, but more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first in this place, then in that place, then in no place at all. If they had been making the whole thing up for the purpose of converting the world, presumably they would have described it more the way the book of Revelation describes how he will come back again at the end of time with "the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure" and his eyes "like a flame of fire, and on his head many diadems" (19:14, 12). But that is not the way the Gospels tell it. They are not trying to describe it as convincingly as they can. They are trying to describe it as truthfully as they can. It was the most extraordinary thing they believed had ever happened, and yet they tell it so quietly that you have to lean close to be sure what they are telling. They tell it as softly as a secret, as something so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, that to tell it any other way would be somehow to dishonour it. To proclaim the resurrection the way they do, you would have to say it in whispers: "Christ has risen." Like that.”¹

¹Frederick Buechner's thoughts on "proclaiming" the resurrection, from "The Secret in the Dark" found in *The Longing for Home* and reprinted in the book *Secrets in the Dark*:

When I read this from Buechner I pondered how true it was. Sure it is an amazing story but it seems that Jesus appears - just shows up while these folks are attempting to get on with their ordinary lives. Jesus appears to the women while they are attempting to carry out the burial ritual. Jesus appears to the disciples when they are attempting to get back to fishing - doing what they know. Jesus even appears to the disciples when they are trying to hide from those they fear. Now the awe and amazement of the story really is something that should be as big as the proclamations throughout Revelations but the way Jesus appears, even after his death is more ordinary than that.

So I wonder if that is how God shows up to us even today in everyday resurrection experiences.

Let me show you what I mean.

What's this - A cocoon - that's right - now if you didn't know anything about this would you really expect a beautiful butterfly to come out of it? Resurrection?

What's this - A seed and dirt - again, if you didn't know anything about this could I convince you that a beautiful flower would come out of this? Resurrection?

Easter is all about LIFE. The unbelievable life of Jesus that conquered death. And in conquering death we celebrate life and love. We are reminded that new life can burst out of the darkest of moments, and out of the most unexpected places. Maybe even the ordinary everyday places of our lives. Maybe that is where God shows up.

Gary Paterson shared with us in his Easter message the story of an 80 year old artist met who "living in Prince Edward Island, still full of energy and creativity, involved in the community, in her art, in life. Frequently, at the end of a conversation, instead of offering an ordinary, "Goodbye, have a nice day," she was known to say, "Be a verb!"²

Paterson went on to suggest that this would be the perfect Easter greeting. Perhaps Jesus does not come with Angels singing and announcing his presence, like at his birth, because Easter shares the story that reminds us that now its our turn to live the message. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins turns the noun "Easter" into a verb, as in, "Let Christ Easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us..."

So perhaps just like the other ordinary things of Resurrection, we too are called as ordinary people to be Easter, to offer the resurrection life to all the world. "It seems to be what happened to those first disciples. Once they encountered the risen Christ they became newly alive, full of energy. They became verbs, running off to tell everyone they met about what has happened. Notice how many "Easter-appearance" stories turn into "sending-stories," "be-a-verb" stories. Mary Magdelene ordered from the garden to tell her fellow disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

² Paterson, Gary Easter Message "Be a Verb"

Cleopas and his friend racing back from Emmaus, full of good news. The great commission in Matthew's gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Or the great commandment at the end of John's gospel, "Feed my sheep!" Verb stories, all of them!"³

It's surprising what God can do. This day is the most surprising, amazing day we can possibly imagine and yet if we are honest God fills this world with the miracles of new life every day. Every day is this amazing.

"As the apostle Paul reflected on the death and resurrection of Jesus, it became clear that this was not a once-upon-a-time story. Rather, he recognized that this was a once-and-for-all-reality with implications that stretch farther than the eye can see and are larger than the mind can grasp fully. Jesus' resurrection is such a transformative event that it is as if the world now rotates on a different axis.

Paul understood from the start that the resurrection was not simply about what happened to Jesus; it is about what happens to all who trust in Jesus, and about what can happen to all who claim his story as their own. The resurrection is not simply the assurance that Jesus was victorious over death; it is also a promise that we can share in that victory with him. The resurrection does not mean only that Jesus was triumphant over evil; it also assures us that evil will not be ultimately triumphant in our own lives.

That might be a hard story if you don't feel up to being Easter - to offering new life. Perhaps you are more like the disciples huddled in a dark room, afraid, mourning, not feeling like they had anything to offer. Which is quite possible. That is why when Jesus appears to those disciples the story becomes wonderful again, because it says he breathes new life into them. He says "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." and he follows the command with the gift: "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" And that's when it happens—the disciples are filled with life, with hope.

As we head into this season of transition, as we celebrate the last Easter service in this particular space, with this particular group of people "Who knows what the future holds; the specifics aren't revealed. Maybe the church will flourish; maybe not. Maybe the disciples will end up hiding in catacombs, with crucifixion a constant threat. Or maybe they will heal the sick, free the prisoners, bring sight to the blind, feed the hungry...who knows? But sometimes I imagine Jesus leaning towards us, just like that 80-year-old woman in PEI, whispering, maybe on occasion even shouting, "Be not afraid; let God Easter in you, in your church. Be a verb." Perhaps that is what God is shouting to us as individuals and congregation this day. "Don't be afraid, let God Easter in you. You were created for new life, for abundance, for growth - Go forth and live the resurrection life"

³ IBID

So on this Easter day and throughout this whole season go forth from here noticing the Resurrections happening all around you and then ask yourself what is God wanting to resurrect in us? See this isn't just a story for us to remember, this is a incident in history for us to live out of. We are called not to sit in our space and listen to a story from history we are called to live it!

Let us go from here and live this ordinary, hopeful, Resurrection story of new life, abundant life for all the world.

Amen.