

Resurrection

Romans 6:1-11

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

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Romans 6:1-11

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

A few years ago there was a short lived TV series called ‘Resurrection.’ The series followed the residents of Arcadia, Missouri, whose world was turned inside out and upside down when their loved ones began to return from the dead, and each had not aged since their deaths. Some citizens welcomed the returned with open arms, but for others this was a crisis and chaos that called for their destruction. The show lasted just long enough to raise many questions before being cancelled and leaving open many cliff hangers. What would it mean if someone could return, if someone could indeed be resurrected? Would you trust that this was the true and same person? In your joyful reunion would you fear them disappearing again just as quickly? What would change in your life?

These questions are good and valid to ask at any time, not just for a sci-fi TV show, as resurrection is always around us; just not quite the way ABC portrayed it. Resurrection, renewal, new life, happens all around us, and to us, in ways big and small. As we have moved through this Lenten season we have focused on preparing ourselves for the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Lent we take the time and the practices to see why the world needed a redeemer, and why we, as ones baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, need a redeemer. Yet before we come to the glorious celebration of Jesus' resurrection soon, it is good and wise to reflect on what we have been resurrected to in our own lives, how by God's grace we have risen up from ways that our lives were decaying, hurting, failing and yet found revival and newness. These are deaths writ small, but they are deaths that have led to rebirth and to a reawakening. We die into something so that we can prevail anew. We are reminded that in the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree.

Erik Klobell tells of a childhood friend who absolutely loved baseball. For Peter, no matter what the week was like, the baseball games were, "a few sacred hours {of} joy {that} will come with the toss of the ball, the crack of the bat, and the dignity of a dirty uniform. " He looked forward to games like a child looks forward to summer camp—eagerly, single-mindedly, knowing that however formidable that week's problems may be, there was a baseball game coming up.

We all have that something special in our lives. Perhaps it is a relationship, an activity, a hobby, something that is very special and meaningful to us, something that we hold onto even in tougher times because it is so important to us. Time with this person, this pleasure, means so much to us.

On Peter's 50th birthday his orthopedist told him that an injury from a skiing accident would mean not being able to play baseball again. The man who used to say that 'life was complicated, baseball wasn't', saw again just how complicated life could be. He was being sidelined from one of the most important things in his life.

Life is complicated. That relationship that means the world to us is altered as that person moves away so all those countless get togethers, fun times and conversations become separated by numerous miles. Or things happen and the beloved hobby or activity can no longer be what it used to be for us. We lose someone, something, that has been a valued and loved anchor in our lives.

As time went Peter spoke of watching his friends play. He said, "I didn't think I'd want to; I thought it would be too painful to sit there like the kind of stone we'd dig out of the infield dirt and toss onto the sidelines...But I've come to realize that a big part of the enjoyment of the game has to do with something other than playing. To be out under that rich blue sky, the morning sun, the smell of the grass, and most of all to be surrounded by my buddies, all in all, it's not a bad compromise. Life is still complicated, but baseball still isn't."

That was Peter's resurrection moment because he took something of the old into the new. He didn't bury his grief, nor did he let it bury him. He let go of what he had to but found new life, new hope, new connection. His joy of baseball had a new life.

We too have those resurrection moments when we take something of the old into the new. We find new life, new hope, new connection. We find new ways to continue the old relationship, new ways to enjoy or appreciate what we can no longer participate in. The face to face conversations become long distance phone calls and Zoom chats, we teach about our former hobby, we share memories of beloved activities.

These are the small deaths, the small resurrections, we encounter over and over in our lives, keeping us mindful that death does not win, that again and again we rise up. We die into something so that we can prevail anew.

The Resurrection TV show raised questions in a fictional setting that are serious questions when people experience resurrections in their lives that are not from the deaths writ small, but the bigger, harder, harsher deaths and jubilant resurrections. For someone who has struggled and succeeded in recovering from drug or alcohol misuse, or finally broke free from an abusive relationship, or reenters society after time in prison, they, and those around them can wonder, can there indeed be resurrection here? Is this change true and trustworthy? Do we celebrate with joy or fear that this will fade away? What will change, and what will not?

By the grace and reality of our baptism we know that we can walk in newness of life, we are assured that we have been united with Christ in a death like his, so we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Our baptism is a lifelong process, a lifelong journey, that only begins at the font, and by this joining with Christ in life, death and resurrection, we too embody a resurrection life. We hold firmly to this message, mindful that what seeks to separate us from God cannot do so as grace abounds.

Paul wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain,” so that by his example, by his resurrection from oppressor and persecutor to apostle and teacher, we too may know God’s grace is not in vain, that resurrections in our lives are possible, true, sincere and lasting for deaths writ small and large. While there were indeed many who doubted his conversion, his resurrection, his new life, as the leap was so radical, the grace of God resurrected Paul in ways that were trustworthy and true, and this was a joy that could never fade away for him, or for us.

Resurrection is the triumph of possibility over despair, it is the work of creation and liberation, it is what happens when the power to unite is stronger than the power to divide, and when the power of life overcomes the power of death. Amen.

Klobell, Erik, *The God of Second Chances*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008, pp 76-77, 81-82