

Easter Sunday

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*Practicing Resurrection*

In his book, *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis shares an experience he had attending a service at the Cathedral of St. George where Archbishop Desmond Tutu was presiding. At the time Nelson Mandela remained in prison and Apartheid wielded its oppressive grip over the South African people. As Archbishop Tutu was preaching, a group of the South African Security Police broke into the service. Wallis says: "Tutu stopped preaching and just looked at the intruders as they lined the walls of his cathedral, brandishing writing pads and tape recorders. ... They had already arrested Tutu and other church leaders just a few weeks before and kept them in jail for several days. ... After meeting their eyes with his in a steely gaze, the church leader acknowledged their power ... but reminded them that he served a higher power than their political authority.

Then, in the most extraordinary challenge to political tyranny I have ever witnessed, Archbishop Desmond Tutu told the representatives of South African Apartheid, 'Since you have already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!' He said it with a smile on his face and an enticing warmth in his invitation, but with a clarity and a boldness that took everyone's breath away. The congregation's response was electric. The crowd was literally transformed by the bishop's challenge to power. From a cowering fear of the heavily armed security forces that surrounded the cathedral and

greatly outnumbered the band of worshippers, we literally leaped to our feet, shouted the praises of God and began dancing. We danced out of the cathedral to meet the awaiting police and military forces who not knowing what else to do, backed up to provide the space for the people of faith to dance for freedom in the streets of South Africa.”

It would be another decade before Mandela’s release from prison and inauguration as South Africa’s president. Tutu and his people had a long struggle ahead of them. And yet, here in this cathedral through the proclamation of a smiling preacher they were set free. Wallis wrote that apartheid did not end on the day Mandela was released or inaugurated, but that it ended that day in St. George’s Cathedral, when the people danced right past those guards and police out into the streets, rejoicing in the power of the resurrection.

Mary had returned to Jesus’ tomb in the early hours of the morning while it was still dark. She needed to be there in her grief. She needed to be as close to her Lord as she could possibly be. When she arrived her grief turned to confusion and anger. The tomb was empty. How dare someone come and steal the body of her Lord! She couldn’t walk away as Peter and John did believing in what they had seen. Mary stood there, a fresh grief welling up within her. The injustice of it all was too much for her to bear. She couldn’t even recognize Jesus when he came to her in the garden. But then in the midst of her despair, in the midst of her hopelessness and anger and fear, Jesus called out to her by name and Mary saw it was him. The power of the resurrection was revealed that morning not only through what had taken place in the empty tomb, but through what had occurred in Mary herself.

In her memoir, *Practicing Resurrection*, Norah Gallagher writes, ““When I think about the resurrection now, I not only wonder about what happened to Jesus. I ponder what

happened to his disciples. Something happened to them, too. They went into hiding after the crucifixion, but after the resurrection appearances, they walked back out into the world. They became braver and stronger; they visited strangers, and healed the sick. It was not just what they saw when they saw Jesus, or how they saw it, but what was set free in them... What if the resurrection is not about the appearances of Jesus alone, but also about what those appearances point to? It's finally what we do with them that matters; make them into superstitions or use them as stepping stones to new life. Maybe resurrection, like everything else, needs to be practiced."

Jesus told Mary in the garden, "Don't hold onto me, Mary. Go and tell others what you have seen. Share this good news. Share the resurrection life with others." Mary learned on this very morning that resurrection is not something simply to be witnessed or even to be believed, but to be practiced. Jesus pushed her out of the cemetery, out of the place of death and darkness. After all it is no place for anyone intent on rejoicing and proclaiming new life. As the worshippers had been set free by their own resurrection moment in St. George's Cathedral, so, too was Mary set free in the garden. And I imagine she danced with the same exuberant, wild joy through the streets of Jerusalem as she made her way back to the disciples to tell them the good news.

Yes, we gather today to hear again this remarkable story and to rejoice in this event. But I think even more importantly we gather to hear Jesus say the same words to us as he said to Mary. "Share this good news. Share the resurrection life with others. The place of death and darkness is no place for you. You have been set free!" Today and every Sunday, for that matter, we are pushed out of these doors to practice resurrection in our homes and workplaces, among friends and strangers, alike, and to dance in our streets with the same exuberant joy. Practicing resurrection is living with the expectation that God is doing a new thing in our lives, even when we can't see it. And

it means we are both willing to embrace that new thing God is doing and then share it with others.

You see I think that the other crucial piece to practicing resurrection is that we do not do so alone. We practice resurrection in community. As Presiding Bishop Jefferts-Schori asserts, "The Christian community is meant to be a mutual hope society, with each one offering courage to another whose hope has waned, insisting that even in the darkest night, new life is being prepared." When all we can do is weep, unable to recognize behind the tears that the risen Christ is standing right before us, when all we can see are our oppressors invading our sacred space, we need to hear the clear and bold voice of our brother who says to us, "Darkness and evil have not won. Death does not have the final say. Our God does and she tells us that we have been set free in Jesus!"

Let us rejoice this day in this good news given to Mary at the tomb and proclaimed to those South African worshippers in St. George's Cathedral. Let us remember that it is our good news, as well, ours to embrace, ours to share and ours to practice with those we encounter along the way.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!