

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord, Cycle A

Matthew 28:1-10 and John 20:1-9

For most of high school, our youngest, Laura, did not work hard. Who cared if she failed biology? Who needs chemistry in real life, she demanded. No matter how John and I described the future, Laura was defiant... until we took her on her first college visit. She saw students studying in the library and walking to class. Our student tour guide described college life. Magically, from that day forward, Laura became a hard-working student. She had had an experience of college and could now imagine herself in it.

The imagination is funny: while it involves putting things together in new ways, imagination relies on experiences and memories as building blocks. We can arrange these experiences innovatively, but we do not create from thin air. E.g. If all we know is violence, we will not be able to resolve conflict peacefully. Someone will have to show us.

Since Jesus' resurrection is hard to imagine, God has given us many experiences of new life. The seven Old Testament readings from the Easter Vigil are a sampling. First God creates the world in six days simply by speaking it into being, a world intrinsically good and topped off with rest. Then comes the impossible tale of God asking Abraham to kill his only child as an act of worship. Next God parts the Red Sea to free the Israelites and destroy the greatest army in the world. Isaiah sings of God as our spouse, whose faithfulness is more permanent than mountains. The second Isaiah reading calls us to have our fill of free water, wine, bread and milk simply because God is utterly generous. Baruch says that Wisdom bridges the gap between God and us. Finally, Ezekiel envisions God replacing our stony hearts with natural hearts.

Then Romans declares that Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection. Do we have enough experience to imagine this Good News? What do we know firsthand of new life?

Lots! The whole planet dances through the endless cycle of seeds falling to the ground to die so new life can grow. Spring is the flamboyant affirmation of that fact! Personally speaking, I watched my father move from alcoholism and depression to health and love. I found my dear husband after twenty lonely years of waiting. I see my students grow in their desire to serve others. Last week, after I gave an online evening of reflection, a participant wrote that she came worried, found comfort in the companionship and kept that feeling for days afterwards. An Internet provider is giving students in the Philadelphia school district free Wi-fi so they can access schoolwork during the pandemic. Families are spending time together. People are shopping less and sharing more. The planet is repairing itself.

"Behold!" Matthew declared when the Magi discovered the Christ Child. In the Easter Vigil gospel, the angel uses the same word when talking to the two Marys: "Behold!" When Jesus appears to them a few minutes later, the author repeats, "Behold! Jesus met them on their way and greeted them." They approach Jesus and hug his feet. We too can see and touch the risen Jesus, here, now, in the beautiful people who enrich us with love and life. We can bring Jesus to others by bringing love and life to them.

It is so important to notice that both the angel and Jesus say to the women, "Do not be afraid." In a recent conversation, I was gushing about the positive changes I have seen lately and said I hoped they would continue beyond the pandemic. My companions shrugged their shoulders, unconvinced. Our experiences may make new life seem foolish, but cynicism is just fear in disguise. We need the hope of imagination.

In John's version of the Resurrection, read on Easter morning, Mary thinks someone took Jesus' body. Peter and the beloved disciple need to walk into the empty tomb. Even with the folded burial cloths as proof that the body was not stolen, the beloved disciple believes but does not yet understand. It is still dark for these disciples, just as it is still dark for my skeptical conversation partners. True, we do not fully understand the resurrection, but if we look at all the evidence of new life in Scripture and in our experiences, we can imagine it. Our imagining is the first step in letting God make it real in our lives.

- ❖ In the past twenty-four hours, where did God offer you new life?
- ❖ With what you know about God's generous gift of resurrection, imagine life after the pandemic. What do you hope people will do differently than they did before sheltering in place?

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