

On Bodily Resurrection
Luke 24:1-12
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
April 21, 2019 (Easter Sunday)
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Today we celebrate the central story of Christianity – the story of resurrection. Today is *the* high, holy day of our faith. (Perhaps that’s why so many of us have gathered!) Today we hear a story we love to celebrate – after all, who doesn’t like a happy ending? We also celebrate a story that challenges our modern minds and leaves many of us uneasy.

And so, we have all found our ways to deal with that.

Some of us find that our faith allows us to set aside our otherwise scientific leanings and to simply embrace the mystery of resurrection.

Some of us have spiritualized the idea of resurrection and embraced a faith that believes in new beginnings and second chances and the power of life over death, even without embracing a physical resurrection of Jesus.

In whatever ways we have dealt with it, the reality is that the Christian message is dependent upon resurrection. If the story ended with crucifixion, frankly the story would have ended. We wouldn’t be here today. If our faith were rooted in the crucifixion, then it would be a faith of people choosing violence against each other, a faith that says God is a god of death, not of life. But that is not what happened.

No, “the Christian community was not born at the foot of the cross, but at the door of an empty tomb.”¹ The Christian community survived and thrived, not because the disciples were so amazing – they were humans with strengths and foibles just like you and I – but the Christian

¹ Jan G. Linn, *A Different Jesus* (Helena, MT: Sweetgrass Books, 2014), 49.

community thrived because they were enlivened by the gift of life that they experienced through Jesus.

Now, I have to confess, and many of you know this already: I am not a person who needs to have everyone believe the same way I do. I am not a person whose faith is dependent upon the truth, as in the provability, of any one story. My faith is not dependent on whether Noah's ark contained exactly two of every animal or whether Jonah was actually swallowed by a whale. I find, what I call "capital t Truth" in the faith stories regardless of their factuality. And I've studied enough to know that some of the stories Christians often fight over were told and understood as myths from the beginning.

So, for me that leads to a place where I believe in the Truth of resurrection regardless of what anyone does or does not prove about Jesus' physical being in the days after the tomb was found empty. The Truth of resurrection would be as substantial for me even *if* the writers of the gospels had represented Jesus simply as a ghost. The idea that death does not have the final word and that God continues to live and move and love beyond any terrible acts that humans can do to other humans *is* resurrection, and it matters.

But, I also recognize that sometimes we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Sometimes, as modern people living in a scientific era, we can't embrace the idea of Jesus really and truly coming back to life as a real, living being, and so we simply dismiss it. And we carry on with our faith in spite of it. Or we spiritualize it and make it about some far off time and place that we've come to call heaven.

However, we risk something when we do either of those. See, one of the gifts of the resurrections stories *is* that they tell of a *bodily* resurrection – a resurrection in the flesh, in this flesh, in our world. And that is not to be missed.

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After all, consider who our Jesus is. He is one who didn't just get beamed down to earth, but who was born in the same fashion you and I were born, amidst the literal blood, sweat and tears of human effort. He is one who walked great distances and likely had blisters on his feet, perhaps more often than we'd like to know. He is one who spoke to great crowds and probably lost his voice a time or two. He is one who knew what it was to be famished after a long day of work where his vocation kept him so busy that he didn't even stop for a bite to eat.

And not only did he know the very real details of what it means to be human, to live in an amazing and wonderful yet imperfect body, he also cared for people in the midst of the human condition. He healed those who were hurt. He heard those who had been ignored. He welcomed those who had been pushed aside. He offered comfort to those who were grieving, challenge to those who were perverting God's word, a push in a risky direction to those who were on the cusp of fully embracing God's way.

Friends, ultimately we believe that the way of Jesus is the way of God, that any power that Jesus accessed was God's power. If that is true, then God could have simply sat at a distance and done what God willed. But instead we came to know God best because of one who lived in a human body in a real time and place, one who built relationships with others

And so, on this Easter Sunday, I encourage you to embrace the idea of bodily resurrection because it reminds us that this life matters. That what we do here and how we live here matters. And it matters not in the sense of punching our ticket to heaven, but it matters because God cares about this world. Jesus lived, as we do, in the midst of the time and space of Earth. And bodily resurrection, whether you embrace it as an amazing miracle or as the hope of Jesus' closest followers, reminds us that the promise and hope of Easter aren't for tomorrow but are for the here and now.

Jesus came to reveal God's love to us more clearly. Jesus came to live in God's ways with the hope that we would choose to do the same. The Bible is clear that the kin-dom of God is expected to be established here on this green and blue and brown planet, where relationships bring joy and pain and are often messy, where we are more connected to each other and all of creation than we realize.

Friends, as we celebrate that he is risen, as we celebrate the mystery of resurrection, let us not lose sight of where that story is positioned...right here in the midst of life. Remember, Luke tells us that as the women went to the tomb they were greeted by two men in gleaming white clothing who said them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"²

So, let us not lose sight of our calling: to find the resurrected Jesus here in this life, in this world...to do the work of Jesus here in this world...to live fully and faithfully in the bodies which we are given...to share God's love and grace generously in the time and place in which we live...to make a difference for people we meet – friend and stranger – each day of this life...to remind ourselves again and again that our faith isn't about someday or somewhere out there, but is about today. Our faith is about this life which every day is given to us again, this life for which we have been gifted to change the world.

Amen.

² Luke 24:4-5, NRSV.