

“Practicing Resurrection”
The Rev. Lauren McDonald
Bruton Parish Church – Williamsburg, VA
Easter, April 21, 2019
Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 24:1-12

In her book, *Heart of Flesh*, Joan Chittister writes, “Maybe we need to realize that spirituality is what we DO because of what we say we believe rather than the pursuit of belief itself.”¹

What we DO because of what we say we believe.

Today we hear the story again of women creeping in the early dawn to discover a tomb with its entrance open and no body inside, then hearing two men dressed in dazzling white asking them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” The men remind them that Jesus has told them that this is what would happen.

The women remember and believe, even though they haven’t yet seen Jesus, only the lack of him. And then they *do* something. They share the story of what they’ve seen and heard. Jesus is no longer among the dead – he is risen. They rush to tell the other disciples.

Who don’t believe. Who think the women are delirious.

Who have not yet experienced resurrection for themselves.

It does seem impossible.

They all saw Jesus die on the cross. That’s a fact.

Hard to imagine he could be alive. But Peter goes and checks, just to make sure, and when he sees for himself, he starts to believe.

¹ Chittister, Joan, *Heart of Flesh: Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Wm B. Eerdmans: 1998), 15.

Eventually Jesus will appear to them all. Eventually they will all believe. But that's not the point. The end goal isn't believing. It's what they do with that belief. Coming to believe is just the beginning – then it's time to get to work. When Jesus dies, his disciples huddle and hide, but once he is resurrected, they are transformed, too. They get braver, they go out into the streets sharing the story with complete strangers.

They preach and proclaim and heal. Something has changed inside them.

They are practicing resurrection.

If that phrase is familiar, you've probably read Wendell Berry's poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front."² The poem starts with a critique of our consumer culture, the way we "Love the quick profit, the annual raise, vacation with pay. Want more of everything ready-made." The poem describes how our lives have lost true value and meaning, and it offers a solution:

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it...
Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.

The poem goes on too long to share it all, but the last line is, "Practice resurrection."

Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.

² "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from *The Country of Marriage*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973.

The facts are that Jesus was dead on the cross. Having suffered terribly. His body was in a tomb. The religious leaders had won. Jesus was no longer a threat.

Except, God wasn't done. God had something else in mind. Something unexpected and extraordinary.

But the disciples didn't know how to be joyful yet in the face of facts that were anything but joyful. They hadn't understood what Jesus had been telling them. As far as they knew, Jesus was dead. They didn't yet know how to practice resurrection. They were just beginning to learn.

What about us?

What does it mean for us to practice resurrection?

What does it mean for us to do something about what we say we believe?

It's not like we can bring people back from the dead. Only God can do that.

But, as Wendell Berry suggests, we can love the Lord. We can love the world. We can love someone who doesn't deserve it. We can laugh and forgive and sing. We can apologize when we do something wrong and make amends and reconcile. We can tell others where God has worked in our lives to transform us and use our stories to bring hope to others.

We can be joyful even when the facts seem to point to doom and gloom and destruction. Even when we think we know the end of the story, when we think that there's no way out, we cannot know what God has in store.

"I am about to create new heavens and a new earth," says the Lord. Even in the time of the prophets, God was telling us about the new things that God was up to. God is always doing a new thing if we will only look and perceive it.

We don't get to know today what will happen tomorrow. Tomorrow could be the day that God does something new in our lives and everything changes. It might not be the day, but it could be.

And that "could be" is where we get our hope. Trusting that even if what happens tomorrow isn't what we wanted, God will use it, redeem it, or turn it into something even greater than what we ourselves could have imagined. We may only see an empty tomb today, but it could be that resurrection is coming tomorrow.

In the meantime, we get to practice.

By sharing the best story of all – Jesus is no longer among the dead; he is risen.

Sin doesn't win. Death doesn't win. God wins.

We get to share our experiences of new life.

We get to share how we have seen God's love transforming the world.

We get to be joyful, even when we consider all the facts that seem to prevent that.

Sisters and brothers, do not look for the living among the dead.

That tomb is empty.

God is doing a new thing.

Go out and look for it – you will see it breaking out everywhere.

Practice resurrection.

Share the story:

Alleluia Christ is risen!