

ALLOWING RESURRECTION

Our story today is The raising of Lazarus. Thank you readers for the dramatic reading and thank you choir for your rendition of our Ezekiel story.

To recap ... A beloved friend of Jesus, Lazarus, was ill. Jesus was beckoned to help him and, eventually, Jesus went his friend as requested. However, he didn't arrive until Lazarus had died. Whereupon God raised Lazarus to life amid amazed onlookers, who now all believed in Jesus, even though these were the same people who had stoned Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.

PRAYER: I pray with all in the hearing of my voice that God's guidance is heard today.

There are amazing insights in the eleventh chapter of John. The author called "John" is a great storyteller, so revered in the first century where the written word was orated and shared with many people at once. Learnings from these orations would be discussed and chewed on long after the presentation and I'm pretty sure that many thoughts would have emerged in this highly social context. I wish, every day, that we had that wonderful arena for scriptural sharing ... can you imagine the conversations we'd be having if we'd just heard that this preacher had brought a man BACK TO LIFE? But that kind of interaction is not always available to us, so today, I share with you what insight came to me, that we might use as guidance to our lives, in Christ.

I discovered four insights about the complex topic of resurrection:

1. Resurrection is not just at the end of days, but constantly as we live and believe.
2. One must die to be resurrected.
3. Only God resurrects. We cannot 'resurrect' ourselves.
4. Resurrection has far reaching affects.

Let's explore these four declarations a bit beginning of course with # 1: Resurrection is NOT just for the end of days, but for those who believe.

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.", Jesus said to her, "**I am** the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

So, we begin to understand that resurrection does not just happen once but can happen many times. Not at some unknown distant 'whenever' time, but relative to our human lives, perhaps more than one time.

2. We must die to be resurrected.

Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

And from Ezekiel Everything is always pretty awful, but once death comes ... and it needs to come first, God will create something new ... God will create a revival.

If there is no death, there cannot be resurrection, but only a healing and that's good, but it is not a resurrection; a complete changing of ourselves, our structure, perhaps even our appearance. We are resurrected to a new life.

We must die first.

One of the values of taking a look at original language of scripture is that we encounter such amazing and wondrous new perspectives. The word that has been translated as 'death/die' in our scriptures is, in Jesus' language, Aramaic is "mwt" (moot). It is literally translated as 'being separated from a container'. The core of this notion is 'separation'. For our first century middle eastern ancestors, we have already learned that their culture was a communal culture where the 'group' or 'clan' was the safest, indeed the only means of safety and self-worth. Being separated from their clan would have felt like and been as terrifying as 'dying'.

We are not as concerned about an individualized existence in 21st century North America. Separation is not necessarily dying, but we DO need to understand that there is a real necessity to separate from our destructive, ungodly behaviours in order to be resurrected into new life.

In preparation for this talk, I read a book entitled *A Resurrection Shaped Life* by author Jake Owensby, which helped me to an epiphany, a new understanding of the nature of the sin to which we must die.

I was pretty comfortable with our need to die to old, bad habits, ungodly ways, like the lashing out of blaming and anger and of retribution when we are offended by someone, at greediness, at all those things that we do that are 'sins'. In this book, though, I was introduced to our need to die to other things that are keeping us from the Kingdom of God. We also need to die to the pain of childhood trauma, the cringe of abuse, the timidity we experience from insults, and the suspicion that results from oppression, and that old favourite, the lack of self worth from being told that you're not good enough. We need to die to all these things that can **define us, allowing God to replace them with a new definition.**

Interestingly, in the first century, people probably would not have understood this notion of 'defining ourselves', as we do. They would not have seen themselves as a unit, but would have understood their need to 'die' to a destructive behaviour as the best thing for their group. We will see a little later that this affect on the group is actually always true, even as we feel that we exist in an 'individualized culture'.

We can, however, understand what it means to 'separate from the grip of embedded habits, and beliefs, that, at one time effectively protected us from something scary; protected us from the threat of being cast out as a vulnerable child, saved us from being washed away in a storm of angry parents, saved us from the pain of teasing and jabs for being different, or not pretty enough, or not tall enough, or not smart enough.

Our pain is holding us in its grip. We can be resurrected into a new life with God, but the release of the identity of pain must happen.

3 Then we take a look at 'Only God resurrects'.

Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me..."

Psalms 130:7,8

O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Before we can release, or separate from, or die to ... we need to realize that we are often ruled by our pain, by our hurts, and the defenses that help us put one foot in front of the other. This to begin to let the pain go, and allow God to heal us. This is a god-sized job. "Allowing" this to happen is a human-sized job.

The Japanese practice a beautiful artform called *Kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi* "golden joiner or golden repair"- where broken pottery is repaired by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum so that the repairs are embellished. As a philosophy, this treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. The beauty of the scars acknowledged.

This is what God does when repairing our pain ... covers us with the beauty of our scars, healed by the grace of God. With this image of the beauty of our scars, we may be more able to understand their value and begin the process of allowing God into them.

Because, to renew us, God needs complete control and, it appears we will not give up control easily. It appears that we must be dead, completely separated from our life-force, our container, our prohibitive beliefs, to be made completely new in resurrection. We can be resurrected by the power of God and it's a really big deal to be made completely new. We need to allow God to heal ... we need to completely lose control and ALLOW. We do struggle with this. Jesus on the cross is the image we follow to begin to understand the way of 'allowing God'.

4. And the fourth thing we learn is that this amazing effort of resurrection impacts profoundly not only the resurrected person, but all of those who are witness to the resurrection.

Jesus said "... but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

Jesus cried, "Unbind him, and let him go."

The resurrected are 'freed' into a life beyond the condition that had a tight hold on them.

"Many of the Judeans therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him." Witnessing a resurrection changes those who witness it.

Jesus proclaimed, "'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"

"Lazarus come out!" Jesus prays that Lazarus be raised. The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

We are so connected in our humanity that when someone is separated from their old life – those connected to that life are profoundly impacted by that changed person. The new ways of living together are completely different and, completely unexpected - and it changes everyone. Everyone relaxes when the angry person is no longer angry, when the fearful person is no longer afraid, when the injured child is replaced in interactions with the loving adult that resurrection by God has allowed.

Pause

Now, I'd like to tell you something that happened as I explored this story in John chapter 11, verses 1 to 45. I was blindsided.

There are only two Christological confessions in the gospels. One is Peter's as told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. PETER recognizes Jesus saying, "You are the Messiah the son of the living God" and Jesus responds "You are Peter upon this rock I will build my church." Then Peter goes on to deny Jesus three times, lead the disciples at Pentecost and, indeed, be the rock on which the church of Christ is built. The other Christological confession is in this chapter of John, when "Martha" says the same words, "... you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one coming into the world." And then, Martha disappears.

I will let you research this further on your own, but evidence was discovered in 2016 by a researcher, Elizabeth Schrader, that in the fourth century an original document, Papyrus 66, was actually altered and the name of "Martha" and '2 sisters' was inserted. It is thought now, that the ONLY OTHER Christological confession in the gospel is actually from Mary ... very probably **Mary Magdalene**. The same Mary Magdalene who was also the first witness to the resurrected Christ.

To further intrigue us regarding this discovery is that there is dispute that Mary was from the village of Magdala, but that her name "Mary Magdalene" was actually reflecting a title... 'magdala' in Aramaic means 'TOWER', so **Mary the Tower**. Diana Butler Bass in her talk on this topic asks us to imagine the church if **Mary the Tower** had been **established** as a OUR CHURCH; if the gospel of John had not been altered. You can begin your research at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSH-nfdh>

I will let you look up this historic event for yourself, but I can tell you, when I heard about it, about the fallibility of scripture, I was very, very upset. If this with the unfailing word of God, how does it work if it is subject to such a change ... if it is so fallible? The entire course of the church of Christ may be based on, at the very least, a misunderstanding, and at the very worst a misogynist lie. My blaming, suspicious, questioning self moved into high alert!

Right in the middle of my 'learning about the need to die to old patterns to be resurrected' I was brought right back to my humanity with old patterns of injustice, feeling betrayed, nudged into suspicion. Pushed into the feminist indignity and sorrow that has marked many of our lives.

In his book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell says that to master a skill takes ten thousand hours of practice. The spiritual practices we revere ... forgiveness, generosity, compassion ... require of us constant practice to help us become separated from the old instinctive ways. We cannot 'be separated from' ... 'die to' the affects of those feelings of blame and anger and suspicion unless we spend our ten thousand hours developing the life skills that will see us resurrected.

God resurrects us when we relinquish the power of sin to the power of the grace of God. And because we are human, and because we can be completely blindsided by news that throws us back ... we need those ten thousand hours of practice. I invite you to come here, in community where all of us normal humans disappoint and irritate each other regularly ... giving plenty of opportunity to practice dying to pain and destructive behaviour.

Here, we have an opportunity to be separated from our disappointment by forgiveness, by our greed by generosity and by our judgements by compassion, and we relinquish our power and control and ALLOW

resurrection by the grace of God into God's new life. Reborn and recreated in the light of God. In this Lenten , as our Poet Candace Jones describes it ... the season of PERPETUAL MOTION, we perpetually follow Jesus to the cross. AMEN