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Living into Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10)

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When I **read** the resurrection account in Matthew's Gospel, I am left wondering. Maybe it suited Matthew's particular audience, but it doesn't quite translate for me. There's the drama of the earthquake, and the terrified guards, but I want to know more. I want to interrogate the characters a bit and know their reactions. I want to hear the women's voices. I want to talk to this Jesus and find out what's happening for him. I'm used to John's Gospel, and it's touching story of Mary and Jesus, or Mark where the women run away and tell no one.

Here the women are told by an angel, and by Jesus not to be frightened. They touch Jesus' feet and worship him, we read. Something is going on, and he just tells them to go and tell the boys?

All this makes me wonder, what is my Easter experience? And why is it important? 'Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again'. We say often, but?

I think it's all about butterflies -- about new life when it looks like there is none. It is about Michael Leunig's 'small shy truth', a precious truth which arrives and is born within us, within our emptiness after our waiting... And it's about knowing. It is gift, this resurrection, this Eastering. It's not the earthquake, the thunder, the lightning, it's the sound of sheer silence as Elijah found out¹. It is the knowing, 'Cup your hand around it', live into it, live as if.

We go deeper in our exploration by listening to some eyewitnesses from our time, Jan, Sue and Sarah, companions on the way, who explore God 'Eastering' in us.

First, we hear from Jan Richardson who suggests that resurrection is a process we live into and live out of, and it seems to take time.

She says,

'As I return to the stories of the women who accompanied Jesus in his final days, I wonder how much resurrection **they** felt on that Easter morning.

They experience the joy of encountering the risen Christ, of seeing again the one who honoured them, touched them, respected them, and took them seriously.

But most of the disciples refuse to believe their "idle tale."

I wonder if Mary Magdalene and the other women felt guilty on that Easter morning', she says, 'caught between the joy of seeing their beloved companion and the disappointment of not receiving the responses they desired.'

She continues, 'I think they too live into the resurrection. As these women continue to live with one another, as they reconstruct their lives, as they make their homes with one another, and as they remember their journeys with Jesus and plan for the journeys ahead, they learn what resurrection means.'

¹ 1 Kings 19:12

They learn that broken bodies and spirits can heal, that dry bones can dance. That the spirit can still move.

They learn that they who were intimate with Jesus-in-the-flesh now can become the birthers of Christ's new body as they learn to be the community, the body of Christ in the world.² Now there's hope.

Second, writer Sue Monk Kidd³ tells of an experience she had at the Easter Vigil Service at the end of Holy Saturday in the dark at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

As she reflects in her own way on resurrection she recalls,

'The darkness closed in... My thoughts about Jesus waiting in the tomb for Easter began to blend with the thoughts I'd had during the week about the soul waiting in the womb for new birth. Womb and tomb. The darkness of Jesus' tomb became a place of transformation, a womb, the waiting room of new life. The darkness of death was transformed into a life giving dark.

Can this happen within us as well? she ponders.

I relate to this imagery of womb and tomb, and the transformation that takes place in the dark.

Monk Kidd goes on:

Transformation hinges on our ability to turn our pain (the tomb) into a fertile place where life is birthed (the womb) ...'

When the priest went to light the Paschal candle, symbol of the light of Christ shining in the darkness, the candle flickered in a draft and looked like it was going to go out, but then the priest cupped his hands around the flame, and it grew stronger. Monk Kidd recalled something she had written in her journal that week, *"I feel as if a candle has blown out inside me"*, and she held on in her imagination to that Easter flame, that light of Christ. She says,

the sight of him cradling that little speck of fire burned into me. It was an image of bare, unscripted grace: the light of Christ. Throughout the service, she says, she gazed at the candle's flame ... When I left the church I carried that tiny bit of Easter fire inside me, she relates. This fire, which belongs to us all, is nothing less than the pulse of a new life within the soul. That day, I heard God say to me, Cup your hands around it.'

She continues with an epiphany:

'.. Easter is a verb. Easter isn't only a long ago event that happened but an action that goes on happily inside us today. Hopkins 'let him Easter in us' is to let the Christ-life incubate within the darkness of our waiting. The Christ-life is like the Pascal candle spluttering in the darkness. We need gentle hands cupped around it, coaxing the flame to grow stronger.

I learnt, she says, that in transformation we mustn't run from the darkness but must rather coax the Easter light inside it. She learnt that we turn the darkness of the tomb into the

²Jan L Richardson *Sacred Journeys, A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer*, Upper Room Books, Nashville, 1996, p186

³ Sue Monk Kidd in her book *The Heart Waits — Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions*, pages 154–155

darkness of the womb by cupping our hands around the pulse of True Life and helping it grow.⁴

She continues, *'One way we coax the life of the new self is by living the questions that inhabit any dark night, by dwelling creatively with the unresolved inside us ... and letting it grow*.⁵

Now, finally, we turn to Sarah Bachelard who builds on this, and puts it slightly differently. She affirms that:

'Resurrection life, the experience of the power and joy of resurrection in our lives and the lives of our communities is a gift. It is *God* who raises Jesus from the dead; resurrection is grace through and through. Or, to put it differently, resurrection is as much *kenosis*, [*self emptying*], as is crucifixion – we give/yield ourselves into resurrection just as we give ourselves into death (and this can be just as frightening as consenting to die). Sometimes, our experience is still of waiting – still Saturday – and we know that we cannot just 'make' resurrection happen. Any attempt to do so is a fake. Pseudo-joy and pseudo-consummation.' This is where Jan Richardson's 'cupping our hands around it' comes in.

'And yet', says Sarah, '– resurrection life is also a practice.'

We need to stop waiting to be suddenly transformed/zapped without our having to take 'the risk of beginning to live from resurrection in faith. Resurrection has happened. Christ is risen. So what are we waiting for?'

Sarah continues,

'Whenever we take the risk of telling the truth in the face of fear, when we take the risk of letting go of cynicism or bitterness to trust again, when we let go of playing it safe to love more deeply or make reconciliation possible, then we are living resurrection life.

Whenever in times of darkness and despair we cry to God, trusting that God will hear us, then we cooperate with the Spirit of God praying within us just as the Spirit groaned in Jesus' cry of dereliction.'

'So', she says, 'we do know something of resurrection life in our own experience and we know the difference it makes. We know that we are more alive when we love than when we hate. We know that forgiveness, letting go of grudges and past hurts, brings us peace and life, and that bitterness keeps us captive. Love, truth, compassion, forgiveness – they bring life and, although they can be shaken by fear and suffering, they are always the greater power.'

'So, you see, we do know the way. Living from [/into] resurrection is daring to live as if it were true, even when so much of our lives, in our culture, in our church, in our world, makes it seem a weak and foolish dream.'⁶

The invitation is to live resurrection like we practice meditation, day by day, practicing this shy truth, this rude shock of love reborn in this most unlikely place.

⁴ *ibid.*, p156

⁵ *ibid.*, p157

⁶ handout for a Lenten Study at Holy Covenant '*Inhabiting the Resurrection*' led by Sarah Bachelard

