

April 21
Blooming as Spiritual Practice
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A man named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day, when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet.

He couldn't hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So Jack began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something.

HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? "HELP!"

He yelled for a long time, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice. "Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!"

"I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?"

"Yes, but who are you, and where are you?"

"I am the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere."

"The Lord? You mean, GOD?"

"That's Me."

"God, please help me! I promise if, you'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

"Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's get you off from there; then we can talk."

"Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."

"I'll do anything, God. Just tell me what to do."

"Okay. Let go of the branch." "What?" "I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go."

There was a long silence.

Finally Jack yelled, "HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"

What can resurrection mean to us who do not believe in salvation as a supernatural act, who in fact believe that what saves us comes through, not outside of, our very humanity?

In divinity school, I studied the Christian Bible. It was my most difficult class, involving translation from the ancient Greek, which I decided to study because I thought it would be meaningful to interpret the Christian bible in the text it was written. The meaningfulness weighed not quite as much as the 4 hours a day for 3 years that it took me to untangle that language just a tiny bit.

The meditation on these ancient texts, which lack of knowledge of ancient Greek brewed, slowly, over time and with committed patience, worked a kind of magic on me. The magic that happens when we slow down, in my case, with need to pour word by painstaking word over texts that meant almost nothing at first.

And then slowly meanings arose, find us when we thought we were so far removed from understanding that the wilderness of confusion would find us roaming that dark forest for ages. That Jesus was crucified by the Romans as an enemy of the state is well documented. He died a martyr, not a victim. He would and could not recant in the face of institutional power and domination. He made that choice. He resisted empire.

The passage in the Christian Bible, from John 20, that has Mary Magdalene going to the tomb and finding Jesus' body gone, is extraordinary when translated from the Greek. Each word in Greek has more than one meaning depending on location in the sentence and the words around it. I had to live in relationship to that text; I had to listen until it entered my dreaming.

When I got to the part that Mary weeps and asks a gardener dressed in rough clothes, that she does not know is Jesus, to please return her beloved Jesus and then sobs when she learns it is him; I found tears dropping down my own cheeks while darkness fell around me in the late hours of the divinity school library.

It evoked my longing to see, one more time, those I love who how have died so that I could make amends, tell them I love them again, show them my heart unmasked, listen to what they know now.

I have read many commentaries on this text with Mary Magdalene and many Christian scholars believe that the resurrection that occurred was not literal, but in the hearts and minds of those who mourned, who needed to go on with someone they loved, who gave the strength to resist a power that threatened to destroy them. For them, someone who died became present.

I know this feeling. Do you? I feel it still for my father who died 20 years ago from cancer, for my friends who have committed suicide over these years, for aunts and uncles and grandparents now gone. No matter if they were sometimes selfish or blind or lost when

they were alive. Now I look for the truth their lives held, what their gifts were, how I missed so much when they lived. Their wisdom guides me now, their cells intermingled with mine.

When I consider Jesus' life, a radical, one who could not remain silent in the face of oppression, one who spoke for those who did not have a voice, I consider that his life changed people around him. Many before him who called themselves the prophets the Hebrew bible promised, offered messages, healing, even what some saw as miracles, but the way Jesus' followers experienced his life gave them access to an experience that Jesus, even in death, was a teacher, a guide, a leader the like of which they had never experienced before.

His continuation, in their hearts, lives and teachings, meant that oppression, domination, hatred, separation, walls of all kinds did not have strength or power over them. It meant that love was more powerful than all of the terrible forms of cruelty devised by the Rome Empire. In fact, the early Christians were known for their love, even distinguished from others by it.

How can we resurrect a message so powerful that it has the force to carry us through these times of abandoned civility, morality and Democratic principles? What source of meaning can we draw on together, we of so many beliefs and interpretations and meanings that sometimes keep us from finding a path we can all agree to call by the same name?

For me this path, this spiritual path that we walk together- as a willingness, a courage, to be transformed by one another. We gather here without god or no god, without heaven or hell or a type of sin that condemns us to eternal flames and we dare to say, I too believe that gathering with others who affirm the principles of dignity and connection and compassion, can still change the world with meanings that are still worthy of discussing and inspiring, come they from the holy texts of antiquity or the holy text of now, that we too still hold it as true that we can make a difference that matters.

What would it mean to live in a way so that others know us as the people of love, to be distinguished as a people of love? A love not docile or passive but fierce and unwilling to turn away from the faces of suffering, ours and others. I count myself as one of us who doubt and question while living into the practice of beloved community, willing to be undone, to be made over and over again in the crucible of vulnerability, argument, struggle, beauty and fierce love.

It is our difference, our loving, even our deep distrust of authority and truths that are enshrined, that offers us the capacity of a resurrection that lives within and between us: a resurrection of a beauty and love and willingness to know we cannot know it all, a willingness to call out, Is there anyone else? Is there anyone else who is willing to live as if each day mattered to the lives of everyone around us, a willingness to risk a kind of love that has the capacity to confront greed, hatred and the demise of decency, both within and around us? Is that not a love that could save us all; is that not a love that could change the world and all we know?

This resurrection, this holy remaking of self, this inquiry that transforms us with all the beauty and suffering transformation invites, is one that does not rely on an eternity that promises death can be revoked. But rather insists that this life is worth living to the fullest, hearts flung open, risking what must be risked because it is ours to risk, reaching out to another and knowing the gifts of community are given not because of like mindedness but like heartedness.

This resurrection is ours to roll the stone away from, to name the darkness that lives within us all, and then to look up to see what we have lost is waiting for us while we long for it.

This resurrection belongs to everyone. No text contains it and no person has authority over it. It belongs to us like our skin and pulse. It is the power of our individuality when we trust the hand of love reaching to save us from falling into the cavern where only our own echoes can be heard, the power to be vulnerable and full of fear and to love anyway, to extend the human hand of worth and dignity to all people, to shed the rough clothes that mask the light that has always been ours to give.

Amen.
