

Matthew 28:1-10
Colossians 3:1-4
April 24, 2011

Practice Resurrection

The earth quakes at the shadow of dawn. Early on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and the other Mary walk despondently toward the tomb, the final resting place of Christ, the last sad chapter in a once promising story. The light that had once shone on them and in them had been extinguished upon a Roman Cross. Hope was despair. They were coming to grieve. They were coming to terms with the loss of a dear friend and Rabbi, and suddenly they encounter a great earthquake. The ground shakes and their worldview trembles too, for suddenly they are face to face with a dazzling white Angel and an empty tomb. Even when the terra firma stops quaking, they have trouble finding their feet because an Angel speaks the impossible and commissions them. Jesus is Risen, go quickly and tell his disciples.

We read Matthew about every three years on Easter and there is an awful lot to take in; this year the earthquake perhaps gets our attention. Last year Haiti and this year the terrible quake and tsunami in Japan. You can't help but notice that Easter comes in the Gospel of Matthew with an earthquake. The earth itself reacts and the

scared silly Temple guards are all scattered in front of the open tomb like battered bowling pins. So with both fear and great joy in their hearts the women take the commission to heart, step over strewn sundry soldiers and run to tell the disciples.

Many of us come to Easter like the two Mary's. Many people are distant from Joy and far from purpose; not much of a sense of resurrection in their lives; poking around stuck in the dark like the two Mary's. Dennis W. Bakke says in his book *Joy at Work* that most employees are boxed in by job descriptions, corporate hierarchies and lousy supervisors, their talents are rarely used and their workplaces are joyless and frustrating.¹ Alain De Botton's Book, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* asks the Question, when does work feel good? Aand lands on the answer "rarely." Gallop polls show that as many as 77% of us are unhappy at work² Many come to Easter like to the two Mary's, shaking a bit in various levels of despair, worried about parents and or kids, relationships are unhealthy or dysfunctional. School, neighbors, addictions or illness are sucking the life right out of them. Some come to Easter grieving the loss of a loved one. Many of us, as we say, are dealing with stuff. Many of us

¹ *Joy At Work* by Dennis W. Bakke PVG Seattle Washington 2005 see pages 45-63

² http://workinprogress.blogs.time.com/2007/08/21/three_signs_of_a_miserable_job/

come to Easter neither in despair or crises; but we wonder whether we are stuck or we just feel empty or numb.

Coming to Easter stuck or a little ruffed up or big time messed up, standing on trembling ground, may not be a disadvantage. In fact I have this theory that if there are no deaths, no stuff, no pain and no grit in your life; you probably will fall shy of truly being able to understand resurrection. The letter to the Colossians reminds us that if we have been baptized we have died with Christ. Obviously none of us welcome suffering; but it is true that the crucifixions in our lives, painful as they are, sometimes build character; create empathy and help us to make better choices in the future as long as we survive and heal. The crucifixions in life remind us that the vast majority of us can't go life alone; we need understanding companions, we need faith and we need God. I think the best strategy for overcoming crucifixions is to practice resurrection. For the letter to the Colossians reminds us that if we have Baptized, we also have Risen with Christ.

Practice Resurrection is a phrase I got from Poet, Farmer and Environmentalist Wendell Berry. "Practice Resurrection" are the last two words in his poem entitled Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front. What does it mean to practice resurrection? For one thing it

means to share hope as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary did on Easter morning. They told others of the empty tomb.

In each of the Four Gospel accounts of the resurrection Mary Magdalene is front and center and first to the empty tomb. That the message of the resurrection was first entrusted to women is regarded by biblical scholars as one of the strongest arguments for a certain level of historicity. In Ancient Patriarchal Israel, women's testimony was not permitted or recognized. Had accounts of Jesus' resurrection been fabricated, women would never have been included as witnesses. That Mary Magdalene is identically named in all of them indicates that she was widely acknowledged as the primary witness to the empty tomb. Mary receives the wonder and hope of the morning and shares Easter joy with the world.

Practicing resurrection means living life with wonder and hope. There are clues from God everyday. There are signs and stones rolled back. There are seemingly random occurrences of joy that are really heaven sent. There are messengers in the tombs of our lives, messengers from God. Just as the resurrection is at its center a profound mystery, the saving action of God in the world is sometimes hidden and sometimes ambiguous but always present. Practicing

resurrection means living faith with eyes open to the all the calming Easters that God places in our trembling paths.

Both the Angel and the Risen Christ say to the Mary's do not be afraid. One of the most often repeated exhortations in scripture is be not afraid. Practicing resurrection means setting aside fear and trusting in God even when the earth shakes and the heart breaks.

About a week or two after the earthquake in Haiti, American soldiers were there and helping with the distribution of food for a million homeless people. On a golf course in Port-au-Prince, soldiers from the 82nd Airborne tried to keep order as thousands of Haitians converged on the makeshift aid distribution point. What started out as a fairly orderly operation quickly got out of control as some 25,000 people swarmed the site. Haitians were hungry and desperate. Tensions were rising as people began to push and scream out of frustration and anger. A couple of weapons were subtly aimed, Soldiers were anxious. It looked bad. In a bid to restore calm, U.S. Army Capt. John Hartzog ordered his men to take three steps back and sit down. It worked, as many Haitians apparently sensed the gesture was meant to ease the tension and thousands of them sat down too. Practicing resurrection means taking three steps back and

sitting down. How many of us have chances everyday to go tit for tat when what we should do is de-escalate.

Practicing resurrection means working for peace and justice. One of the reasons that Jesus went to the cross was because he challenged the regime of death there was in the Roman Occupation. He challenged the betrayal that was felt in Jewish Herodian collaboration with Rome. In many cases the people were literally being taxed to death. As we work to balance the budget in our own nation, the needs of the poor must kept front and center. How can a civilized nation spend trillions of dollars on military expenditures while millions are hungry or at risk for hunger in our nation?

You know most of us don't get to say a whole lot about how giant institutions like the government divvy up tax revenue and make laws. We could however and should be more in contact with our congressmen and women and our Senators. I wonder how many of us write one letter a year to the people we elect. I wonder how many of us even make a phone call or send an e-mail. While people in Libya and Syria are dying for a hoped for democracy most of us can't even be bothered to participate or make our opinions known to our leaders. Half of us don't even vote. Living the resurrection is sharing

our values with our world just as Mary shared the news of the empty tomb and risen Christ.

Even when we start to write our representatives and participate in government the fact of the matter is most of us spend most of our time at work, in school, in the family and with our friends. Living the resurrection means living our faith fully in these places even when we are out and about shopping.

After the earthquake and Tsunami in Japan there were rolling black outs and power outages all over the country. Roads were bad and food supplies weren't getting where they needed to be going and regular folks like you and me were and are doing without. Many people felt blessed when they found their favorite grocery item on a shelf. So one day In one convenience store people were on line waiting to pay for their groceries when the power went out. The store owner apologized but explained that he couldn't ring up any sales without power. Everyone on line calmly walked back to the aisles, placed their items back on the shelves and left the store without incident. Something tells me that things might not go like that in our nation even though 60% of us belong to a church and 95% of us are "spiritual." Practicing resurrection means living out your values

everyday in the community. People do notice and ripples of peace are sent into the world.

Commissioned by the Angel to share the news of the empty tomb, Mary and Mary run smack flat into Jesus on their way. Shaken again but overjoyed with wonder they took hold of his feet and they worshipped him. Suddenly it was clear to them that their Jesus was more than a special rabbi or a gifted prophet. Jesus was Lord. This is what they shared. Practicing resurrection means remembering the Sabbath and worshipping God. For many people the Sabbath is a break from the break neck pace we set at work. For many people Sunday is, our play day, and our sleep in late day; and certainly this is part of what God had in mind. But enjoying the Sabbath as exclusively your fun day is kind of like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary just saying hey Jesus how are you, on Easter morning. Nice to see you old friend. The purpose of the Sabbath is to rest but to rest in God. Sabbath keeping is about God and about how God forms us. Keeping the Sabbath is about cultivating receptivity to God. Ask yourself whether your Sabbath keeping is about running another break neck paced day in the name of fun and relaxation or is it about being open to God.

Practice Resurrection. Not one person, not one disciple, not one believer, not one friend of Jesus broke the Sabbath to take care of his body or mourn at his tomb. Each of them as a good Jew honored the Jewish Sabbath which is Saturday. Even in their grief they did nothing to dishonor Sabbath, only on Sunday did the women come to the tomb. Sabbath means stopping and being quiet long enough to see resurrection wonder. God is breaking out all around you, I pray you are resting enough in God to see it.

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front.

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
 vacation with pay. Want more
 of everything ready-made. Be afraid
 to know your neighbors and to die.
 And you will have a window in your head.
 Not even your future will be a mystery
 any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
 and shut away in a little drawer.
 When they want you to buy something
 they will call you. When they want you
 to die for profit they will let you know.

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.
 Denounce the government and embrace
 the flag. Hope to live in that free
 republic for which it stands.
 Give your approval to all you cannot

understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion - put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

*Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from The Country of Marriage, copyright © 1973 by Wendell Berry, reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.*³

³ <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC30/Berry.htm>