

## Easter

Mark 16:1-8

Today, Easter day, we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus from death. What does it mean?

In this strange story from the gospel of Mark, the women who were Jesus' disciples went into the tomb where Jesus, after he had been crucified and buried, had been laid. But it was empty. And, they were reassured by a young man, or not so reassured, because they felt amazed, and were afraid. And they couldn't speak,

Can you imagine yourself there, in the empty tomb? You had loved this wonderful man, Jesus who taught love, and healed people, and spoke about justice—where everyone had enough. He'd created a radical table fellowship, where anyone, no matter what their status or class, ate together, to show that's the way that things are in God's country. And, you had seen how his loving way of living and teaching threatened the authorities. Authorities, whenever, wherever, usually like things to stay the same, and the Roman occupying rulers had clamped down and crucified Jesus, on that terrible day, which ended with your feeling that everything was over, and hope and trust forever gone.

As after great traumatic events—the earthquake in Italy, the capture of our husband by pirates, the death of our beloved child; a sudden terrible diagnosis of illness—as though life has stopped.

Empty.

The bottom drops out.

But, you dare to take another breath.

You hear a beautiful young man say don't be afraid. Jesus—Jesus?—has gone on (gone?) to Galilee (where, you remember, in those bright young days, everything started and where you heard Jesus talk about that incredible, wonderful idea, the kingdom, or land, of God).

In other words, go back home.

You thought it the ending, but it's the beginning, again.

This emptiness is mysterious, could it be that things are not as they seem?

There is a great difference between the circumstances of those women in the tomb and the early church from which and for which the Gospel of Mark was written about 70 years after Jesus' life and death, and Vermont. The women, the disciples, and the early Christians were frightened, faced persecutions from all sides; in Vermont mostly folks

generally are indifferent (VT. and N. H. rate lowest in church attendance at 24%, according to the Gallup Poll of 2004-06). The excellent question then is, why does the church matter?

We may answer that by saying boldly, if humbly, the human race, including Vermonters, needs an evolution of consciousness, a resurrection into new possibilities.

We and 6 billion people live in a world that is armed to the hilt, where conflicts rage, where nature's abundance is ravaged, where a billion go hungry and where the gap between the rich and the poor is huge (2.8 billion live on \$2 a day); where many people fear; where many people feel a loss of meaning and hope. In this world the way of love and radical community is the only way through.

Radical community, God's love of creation (Jesus said that God's knows of every sparrow that falls), the sanctity of life, the importance of humility and service—the world needs to hear and feel this! And the basic message of Easter is that God's power in Jesus is stronger than all other powers. And, that you are loved as you are; and God wants you to expand your sense of self-worth and goodness to bring an evolution of consciousness, the resurrection into new possibilities. Jesus' power in the resurrection defeats sin, brings hope and enables us to act for a world of peace and justice and meaning.

Resurrection has come into our lives here, if you and I can see and feel the mystery of hope in the space of death; openness to being loved; that life is not all that it seems but more. If we can see that in the dark, mysterious space of a tomb, a mysterious immense love can overcome evil and death. If we can remember and trust that Christianity is about a radical, dangerous meal fellowship (where all people are welcome) and about overcoming violence with love.

Sometimes people see things split: into the real world on the one hand and the world of religion on the other, but that is not true; God and the world are mixed up together. God's kingdom is here, ready to be realized, if we can see it.

Creation—resurrection-- can happen out of a space of emptiness or despair. We grow, step by step, love by love.

A therapist treated an autistic boy, for “many sessions she sat with him in the treatment room, he silent and unmoving toward any of the toys left around for him. She sat and felt his isolation and terror. Silent, they sat through whole hours. Finally, he moved toward a big beach ball, bigger than he was, and buried his face, his whole body in it, hugging it as it.” The ball “held” him. “He felt it loved him, receiving his embrace and embracing him back.” (Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Unshuttered Heart*, p 78)

A small resurrection.

Dr. Jill Bolt Taylor, a neuroanalyst, suffered a stroke in the thinking centers of her left cerebral cortex: she wrote: *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*.

After the stroke, she experienced herself as a being of light, radiating to the whole world. She felt a sense of grace, peace, being at one. She no longer perceived herself as separate from everything; “life, I am life, I am alive, Wow!” She felt silence instead of mental chatter and at one with her body. She was enfolded in a sense of liberation and transformation; she felt energy and childlike sense of tranquility, safety, inner peace, joy, compassion. Now healed, she says that “the first thing I do to experience my inner peace is to remember that I am part of a greater structure, an eternal flow of energy and molecules from which I cannot be separated.” She knows she is vulnerable and part of the larger whole. She reminds herself back into this consciousness that the essence of her being has eternal life.

Things not separated but connected.

God, in our world, is like a mobius strip; everything is connected, the inside and outside, the empty tomb and Christ already in Galilee, sadness and then joy; your own discovery of hope and love; the sense we have of understanding, of knowing that life is shot through with love, working toward justice from a situation of violence.

There is no inside or outside.

Resurrection shines through our world.

In Vermont and elsewhere, people are growing and sharing food, and care about the land and want to protect it and reach out to people they don't know in sympathy. They work and vote against discrimination. They know and trust love and community.

Resurrection is sometimes private and sudden.

You may have a sudden openness or softness in your heart, where before you were angry at someone who offended you, and now you see that they are trying to do their best, they have their own problems.

Suddenly you hear music—Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, and you know, you know, that life has meaning, and you are part of that.

Other resurrections include a family able to feed itself due to a calf from LWR and Heifer Project International.

Or the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa, where anyone who had been the victim of race-based violence perpetrated by the Apartheid government and other groups between 1960 and 1994, or who had committed violence, could come forward and be heard and receive amnesty. After the terrible violence such that many of us felt that a bloody revolution alone could create some justice in that land, South Africans created a democratic country.

Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected president of South Africa (1994-99), who served twenty-seven years in prison and when he was freed supported reconciliation and negotiation, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, wrote his vision of life, a resurrection vision: “Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us....You are a child of God; your playing small doesn’t serve the world....We are born to make manifest the glory of God within us. It is not just some of us, it is everyone and as we let our own light shine we unconsciously give other people permission to do so” (Ulanov, p. 76)

Today, in your own heart, accept joy, resurrection, know that you are loved as you are; that you are called to be more; say yes to hope and new abundant life.

Amen.