

“You have heard it said”: script, counterscript
*From the Garden of Eden to the Resurrection Garden*¹
Luke 24:13–35; Psalm 36:7, 51:1, 86:15; Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 4:16

You have heard that it was said: “How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in [God]’s sight, how much less a mortal, who is a maggot, and a human being, who is a worm!” (Job 25.4-6)

But I say to you: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luk 23.34) And again I say to you: “So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

Many of us have heard it said that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...and human beings in God’s image. But in the Garden of Eden, human beings ruined it all. We disobeyed God and by disobeying God, we disrupted the whole trajectory of God’s design and creation. And god was so upset and angry at how terrible we were...we were so hopeless and un-redeemable...that god decided to offer his son as a sacrifice. The sacrifice would make it right again. The sacrifice would pacify and soothe god’s anger. The sacrifice would serve as an offering for our sins. The sacrificial blood would cover our sins so that we could be forgiven. And all we have to do to get in on this forgiveness is to claim the sacrifice, to believe that God’s sacrifice of Jesus was for me. And once forgiven, then I would be loveable. Then god could love us.

This script that many of us have heard is powerful. It has the power to form and transform our lives. And it also has the power to fill us with deep, unrelenting shame and guilt. To be formed with the script that I am a worm and a maggot...so corrupt that only by

¹ Heavily influenced by James Alison’s *The Joy of Being Wrong*.

sacrificing Jesus could things possibly be made right...is a heavy weight to bear. It's hard to know the joy of love and forgiveness when the entrance price is the death of Jesus.

As enlightened Western readers of the Bible, we begin our reading with Genesis and end with Revelation. We have been taught to read this way and it's so ingrained, so in-scripted in us that we don't even know that we're doing it. We relate to the biblical Story in this linear way where the Old Testament God is disappointed and distant and then Jesus arrives on the scene. And we like Jesus. We're attracted to his presence and compassion. And now we're not always sure what to do with the Old Testament God.

But as Christians, rather than reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we begin our reading in the Resurrection Garden. We begin our reading of the entire Bible in the Resurrection Garden, in part, because that's where the Christian story begins. But we also begin reading with resurrection because God is a living God, an eternal God; the Alpha and Omega; the Beginning and the End. God is, was, and will be...not on a historical timeline...God is in all times, unbound by history and the passing of time. Our identity, our calling, our discipleship begins in the Resurrection Garden.

So we find our orientation in the Resurrection Garden. It is in this Garden, not the Garden of Eden, where we are given our perspective, our frame of reference, our reading glasses. And in the Resurrection Garden we see and hear a powerful counterscript, a counterscript that also has the power to form and transform us.

When we read the Bible on a historical timeline, our orientation is that human beings messed up god's perfect garden and creation. This script never says so explicitly, but written into the story is a god who created human beings without knowing how they were going to turn out, a god who was surprised and then helpless in the face of human choices. This god was powerless, reduced to demanding obedience to a long list of rules. And when people

didn't obey him, he got uncontrollably angry, threatening life-destroying judgments and punishments. This script tells of a god who only loves and forgives people when they do what he says. And when they accept his sacrifice. This script also says that anyone who rejects the sacrifice will be endlessly and eternally punished and tortured by god.

This script gives us a god who uses violence to accomplish his purposes.

But the God we see revealed in the Resurrection Garden is a God who says, "Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." The God Jesus reveals to us chooses forgiveness rather than violence, chooses to be killed rather than do violence to protect Himself or His honor.

The counterscript of the Resurrection Garden doesn't require a sacrifice. Let me repeat this: The counterscript of the Resurrection Garden does not require sacrificial or divine violence. Forgiveness is offered before Jesus, the Lamb of God, is killed. No repentance was or is necessary. The forgiveness is free, no strings attached.

The God that Jesus reveals is a forgiving God. There is no hint of an angry, demanding, or vengeful god. Rather than a god who demands human sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins and redeem humanity, in the Resurrection Garden we see a self-giving God, a God who chooses love and forgiveness rather than the violence of the sacrificial system. Rather than a script that requires the guilt of our sins to be paid for and covered by killing someone or something, in the Resurrection Garden we hear a counterscript that the guilt of our sins is already forgiven, paid for by love, covered by a self-giving God.

In the linear script we understand the Garden of Eden to be a place of innocence and perfection, where everything was endlessly effortless and beautiful. And that's the way heaven will be. In the meantime, we're stuck in this in-between place, enduring our humanity and human ways of being.

The counterscript of the Resurrection Garden reveals a different kind of perfection, a perfection that includes our sin, our brokenness, our wounds, even our violence. In the Resurrection Garden we are able to look at our sins and our wounds without fear, without shame, without guilt. Because the Resurrection Garden is infused with love and forgiveness. The life that the Spirit breathes into us is love and light. Covered by love and forgiveness, we are free to look at our sins and our wounds. We don't have to hide them. Or hide from them. We don't have to be ashamed. We don't have to be weighed down by the guilt of our brokenness and violence.

Now, lest this sounds like pie in the sky or a place that gets us off the hook, let me be clear: We cannot and do not face the truth of our sin from the Garden of Eden. We cannot bear it. Like Adam and Eve, we too cover ourselves, hiding from the truth because it's too much, it's too painful and shameful to stand naked. But in the Resurrection Garden, covered in holy and gratuitous love, we are safe and secure. Wrapped in such powerful love, we have the freedom and courage to look, to tell the truth about our guilt, and to take full responsibility.

Now, maybe you're arguing with me about this counterscript. That it isn't an orthodox understanding of Christianity. The Doctrine of Original Sin, after all, sounds a lot like the script that I've been talking about. But consider that the Doctrine of Original Sin is a *Christian* Doctrine. It isn't shared by Judaism. In other words, the Doctrine of Original Sin could only be seen and articulated from the vantage point of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Human One who reveals the fullness of God. From the orientation of the Garden of Eden, many of us squirm when we hear this Doctrine. Or we blatantly reject it. But when we're standing in the Resurrection Garden, "a place fashioned and furnished by

love,²² rather feeling guilty and ashamed, we are free and fearless to speak the truth of the human condition, in all its beauty and all its horror.

There's another thing that we can see from the Resurrection Garden that wants to be named. When we read the Bible on a timeline, we see the cross and resurrection as a fulfillment of God's Good News, the high point, the essential event. And perhaps, at some level, it is. (I would say it's the full revelation, and I'll say more about that next Sunday.) But from the Resurrection Garden, a Garden of Love, we begin to see something else in the stories of Jesus' healings. The stories of the Samaritan woman at the well, or the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, for example. When the women encounter and engage Jesus, they suddenly find themselves in the Resurrection Garden. When they initially meet Jesus, they are broken and bleeding from the guilt and shame of the scripts that have been written onto them. The isolation and burden of failing an angry and punishing god, of being unable to live within the narrow rules of clean and unclean that such a god demands, is too much for some bodies to bear—and we get sick, depressed, paralyzed.

But then we encounter Jesus, God's beloved son. Jesus has been formed in the Resurrection Garden. And to meet Jesus is to meet Love-made-flesh. To encounter Jesus is to encounter God's gift of forgiveness, already given.

When we stand in the Resurrection Garden—when we live from resurrection—like Jesus, we too are formed by love and forgiveness. It's a powerful formation and transformation. And with time, our orientation that was shaped by the weight of our shame is transformed into an orientation of love and forgiveness. In time, our fear of god's anger and endless punishment is transformed by the liberating power of love and forgiveness. And

² from *Transformed by Life*, Wild Goose Publications

our identity of guilty and unworthy is transformed and we know ourselves loved, endlessly loved.

Finally, the Resurrection Garden isn't a metaphor for living. Nor is it my personal garden, like a bubble that I...that we move around in. Rather, the Resurrection Garden is God's creation—physical, material, bodied. The Resurrection Garden is the new earth that God has been creating from the beginning. We choose, every day, every moment, to live in this Garden. And as we do, we join in a partnership with God. In our living we participate in the tending of the Garden, planting, working the soil, enjoying the produce.

As we are being formed and transformed by the power of God's love and forgiveness, the Resurrection Garden grows, expands. And more and more creatures and creation find themselves being nourished and nurtured by God-who-is-love. God's love and forgiveness is a creating power. And with love and forgiveness, our God is making all things new.

May we dwell in the Resurrection Garden.

May we give ourselves to counterscript of God's transforming love and forgiveness

And may we choose participation with God, growing the Resurrection Garden until it covers the earth.