

Epiphany 6
1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 6:17-26

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?”

This is an interesting question. On one level it's an odd question. Why, in the lectionary cycle, would this passage show up now? We might expect it in Easter, but this is still Epiphany! Jesus was born only two months ago...and we're talking about his death and resurrection already?

But to the question, of course we proclaim Christ resurrected. Why would the Corinthians not have believed in the resurrection of the dead? *We* certainly believe in resurrection.

Or do we?

Yes, we believe that Jesus is raised from the dead. And while we may not be in agreement about whether or not our physical bodies will be raised up in some future time, we are in agreement because by faith we know that when we die, we will live in another dimension, with Jesus and all those who have gone before us.

But our scripts about resurrection are pretty thin. Mostly our scripts limit resurrection to Jesus. Our scripts tell us that resurrection is a one-time event that first of all happens to Jesus after his death. And secondly, it happens to us in some future time when our bodies die. And that is pretty much the end of our resurrection script.

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” Paul's question to the Corinthians is a good one for us. It opens a space for us to listen for a counterscript.

The Good News of Jesus is all about resurrection. We know this. But if our scripts limit our understanding of resurrection to the historical event that happened after Jesus was killed

and put into the tomb, then how do we account for the Good News of Jesus that people experienced while Jesus was *alive*?

Surely it was the power and aliveness of resurrection that people experienced when they encountered Jesus. When Jesus said, “Take up your bed and walk”—resurrection. When Jesus touched blind eyes and sight was restored—resurrection. When Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman at the well—resurrection. When the woman was healed by touching the hem of Jesus’ clothes—resurrection. Encounter after encounter, healing after healing, when people were with Jesus, they experienced the liberating and healing power of life and aliveness. That was resurrection. This, is resurrection.

Resurrection is *so much more* than being made alive after our biological, medical death—resurrection is the pattern of life that God, the cosmic and eternal Creator, wove into creation. Resurrection is the power of life. Resurrection is the creativity, the life force of the Spirit of God. And it is always stirring and blowing and breathing, always bringing life and aliveness in places of death, in impossible spaces, letting die those things that don’t bring life so that something new can rise up in its place.

Jesus knew...deep in his body and being...Jesus knew and *trusted* resurrection. Jesus knew and trusted that resurrection is woven into the fabric of creation, of creatures, of the Kingdom of God...into his own body and being. Surely it is this deep trust in resurrection that had all kinds of people coming to Jesus, especially those who were dying of illness, dying from poverty, dying of oppression, dying from social and religious hierarchies and exclusions.

They came to Jesus. In great multitudes, says Luke, they came to Jesus. They wanted to live. To thrive. They wanted access to the power that inhabited Jesus—the power of

resurrection, the power of the Spirit of God. And when they touched him, the power of the Spirit in Jesus healed them.

Jesus trusted, absolutely trusted, resurrection power. He trusted that the same Spirit that was stirring over the chaos before creation is the same Spirit that continues to stir over creation. The Spirit is always raising up new life in dead and dying places.

This is the context of the beatitudes in Luke's Gospel. After many people had touched him and experienced the resurrection of healing, Jesus turned to his disciples, teaching them: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

It isn't that Jesus is glorifying poverty or hunger or weeping. He isn't. Nor does this blessing say that there is or will be no hardship or struggle. There is and there will be hardship and struggle. What Jesus is teaching his disciples and the rest of us is that there is no shame. There is no shame in poverty; no shame in hunger; no shame in death and dying. There is not only no shame, *there is love*. God's love is especially present, God's love that is home and belonging. And in fact, it is in precisely in these conditions, it is in emptiness and death that the Spirit of God raises up new life. It is in human emptiness, in our powerlessness, in our death and dying that the power of God's resurrection does its work.

But woe to the rich, the full, privileged. When we are fat with our wealth and self-sufficiency, we have no need of God, no need of the Spirit or of resurrection. Because we're taking care of life ourselves, thank you very much. When we're full—when we can buy all the food and security and happiness we need—then we don't need resurrection. We don't need it because we can buy whatever we need to keep death away from us. We can buy enough stuff to keep us from feeling our hunger, enough to numb our tears and grief. "Woe to you who are full now."

Now, if the tempter is inside your head condemning you, please stop! Stop listening to the lies and keep listening for the counterscript and Good News of resurrection!

There are several details in Luke's beatitudes that we need to make sure we pay attention to so that we can keep listening without fear or condemnation.

In v 17, Luke says that Jesus came down from the side of the mountain, where he had been praying, and stood on a level place. Unlike Matthew who has Jesus and the disciples up on the mountain, as Luke is telling this story, they're standing on a level plain. And another detail is that, from this level place, Jesus looks *up* at his disciples. Jesus, the teacher, is on the same footing as the multitudes and disciples, and yet the disciples are over him so that he has to lift up his eyes to see them. If this scene were being staged, the drama of this *leveling* would create a sense of tension and expectation for what happens next.

This looking up at his disciples is Jesus leveling the ground between master and disciple. In the same way, his blessings and woes are leveling the multitudes that have gathered to see him. Jesus isn't reversing blessing. He isn't taking away blessings that people had and instead giving them to someone else, replacing them with woes. Rather, he's removing the boundaries and barriers that social and religious traditions and practices have placed between the poor and the rich. The full aren't in a higher or lower place than the hungry; they're on a level place. We are all on a level place.

Or, if we return to Paul and his image, *we're all part of the one body*. And everyone has an equal and equitable place of belonging and value. Loved, exquisitely loved by our Creator.

In a recent blogpost, Jane Ross Richer recounted the story of being in a conversation with their Cofán neighbors. At some point in the conversation, the conversation sobered as one person recounted a dream, which was even more disturbing because his wife had the same dream. Jane tried to offer consolation, saying, "Perhaps this dream is from God, letting

you know that your beloved son is doing well.” They weren’t consoled. At another gathering some time later, her husband, Jerrell, shared a dream he’d had, and his concern that a friend appeared in the dream in poor health. One of their neighbors, the elder in the group, said to Jerrell, “You do not need to worry about the person who appeared weak in your dream; the one you should pray for is the person who appeared strong.”

The Cofán elder understood these teachings of Jesus. It is those who are full that are cause for concern. When I am full, with enough food and money, I live with the illusion that I deserve what I have. And I live with the lie that what I have is mine. And if it’s mine, then I need to protect it. My fullness—my fatness—keeps me comfortable *with my own power*. Not trusting the power of resurrection. When I refuse to be empty, refuse to experience hunger or grief or insecurity, I am denying resurrection, denying the creative power of the Spirit of God. And I have completely forgotten that *there is only one body*...and I am part of it.

It is this refusal to trust the aliveness and life in the Kingdom of God, this denial of resurrection, that is bringing humanity and creation to the brink of destruction. As long as I keep choosing to trust *my* wealth and *my* food and *my* happiness—denying resurrection, denying the one body—then the systems that keep some members of the body poor and hungry and grieving so that I can be fat, will stay in place. Causing more poverty, more hunger, more grief.

If we continue to live this way—feasting on oil, trashing our oceans, exploiting the land, disposing the poor, the alien, the hungry among us—if we continue in this trajectory, the one body *will* die.

For many of us, our response to this truth is paralysis. We don’t know what to do. And the size and scope of the problems are so big we don’t know where to begin. And in the end, if I become poor and hungry and unhappy, how will that change anything?

It is here that Paul's question is so important for us to hear, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" If we *believe* in resurrection, then it is time for us to *trust* the power of resurrection. It is time to trust that resurrection is woven into the fabric of creation, into the fabric of our bodies and being, of creation. It is time to trust...to trust the creating power of the Spirit of God to raise up new life, even in impossible places.

This is not the time to trust our understandings and fixes. Now is the time to trust God, to trust that God is a living God, and that God can raise up new life, even in the impossible future that awaits creation. God brings new life where there is death. This isn't just something God does, it is who God IS. But first, there has to be death, actual release, real emptiness. It is time to trust resurrection power, and to experience the death of emptying and hunger and grief.

When we trust resurrection, we don't have to know or understand how or when God is going to work it out. That isn't our work. Our work is to give ourselves to emptiness, to hunger, to grief. We may know how to enter the death of emptiness and hunger, but my guess is that the dying and release of grief is something that few of us have given ourselves to.

This is why the lectionary gives us this text today. So that when we enter into the season of Lent in a few weeks, we will do so *trusting* God, trusting resurrection.

May we practice trusting resurrection power, actively trusting that the Spirit of God is raising up new life.

May we actively practice releasing our stuff, our fullness, our trust in ourselves...trust that the fabric of creation is life and love. Study love, eternal and abundant life. It will hold us...in fullness, in emptiness, in life, in death.