

*Re-membered into new life*  
*John 20:19–31*

The Lord is risen! *He is risen indeed!*

For our friends in Gaza, today is Easter Sunday. With them and Christians around the world we celebrate that the Lord is risen! *He is risen indeed!*

It's great to celebrate Easter, isn't it? After the long days and weeks of the Lenten wilderness, we're ready for the joy that comes with the open tomb. We're ready for flowers on the cross, ready to see beauty instead of the starkness of the cross. Ready to put the cross behind us. We're ready for the new life of resurrection.

But. We don't quite know what to do with resurrection. We know it's something that happened to Jesus and...isn't it wonderful? We know that because it happened, it proves that Jesus is the long-awaited Christ. But what is much less clear is what the resurrection has to do with us and with our lives. Yes, it's something that gets talked and preached about in worship, but when we go home, what does resurrection have to do with us on Monday morning? *Pause.*

It has everything to do with us every day of the week. The resurrection isn't something for us to believe in, like a doctrine. Rather, resurrection is an energy, a source of power, a life force that *is*. For followers of Jesus, resurrection is the aliveness of our Living God. Resurrection is the breath of the Holy Spirit within us. Resurrection is the healing we experience when Jesus, the Christ, touches us. Resurrection is the re-membering we experience when Creator God finds us.

But...I think I'm getting ahead of myself. And ahead of the story. So let's get close to the story.... Come and see.

Our story begins with the resurrected Jesus finding the disciples. Last week when Mary couldn't find Jesus, Jesus found Mary. This week he finds his beloved friends who have

locked themselves into their house. They're overwhelmed by fear and a storm of other emotions and trauma from everything that's happened in the last few weeks. Let's take a moment to imagine what they're feeling. What emotions do you imagine they were experiencing? *An actual question.*

It matters that we see and name these emotions. Many of us have been taught to come to these stories with our intellect. We "come and see" theologically. We read and hear them for moral instruction or right doctrine. But we have much less experience entering into them and seeing the humanity of the characters...seeing *our* humanity *in* the characters and storylines.

Back inside the closed-up house, the disciples are shut down and shut in, literally and emotionally locked in....

And then, there is Jesus. "Peace to you," he says. His presence, as much as his words, speak, "Peace." Jesus, God's Word-made-flesh, speaks a word of assurance. His resurrected presence embodies *peace*. Then he opened himself—wounds and all—and as his arms opened, their locked bodies and beings open. Having been paralyzed by fear and trauma, the power and presence of the resurrected Christ is bringing them back to life.

A second time Jesus speaks, "Peace to you." The first time he said it, he showed his open wounds. A second time he speaks, "Peace to you," then breathes into them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." In John's telling of the creation story, we are watching the resurrected Jesus breathing resurrection life into these human creatures. And they become living, resurrected beings. We are witnessing the creation of a new humanity!

This creation story is *our* creation story. In John's re-remembering and telling of the story, we are spoken into being with a Word of peace and the Breath of the Holy Spirit. Our story does not begin with expulsion and exile, but with God, the resurrected Victim, coming close.

Coming close and breathing life, resurrecting life into us. Creator God comes close, so very close that the Holy Breath of God is in us, in the same way that God's Holy Breath was in Jesus.

Then, with the breath of the Holy Spirit in his beloved friends, Jesus says something that, at first, seems a little odd. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Really? "Forgive and be forgiven or don't and you won't"? What does forgiveness have to do with resurrection? We usually think of Jesus on the cross as being the forgiveness of sins. In fact, a lot of time and energy has been spent on how it is that Jesus dying on the cross forgives our sins. But here...here Jesus is putting the power of forgiveness into the hands of the disciples. He is giving the power of forgiveness to them as their mission and purpose.

(Let's take a moment here.... Take a deep Spirit breath with me.... There is so much here. The story is so dense. There are so many details....)

Jesus is putting the power of forgiveness into the hands of the disciples. The Greek word "forgive" literally means "release" or "let go." Jesus is releasing his power of forgiveness, sharing it with his beloved community! There is something here...something about the power of resurrection...and it's directly related to the power of releasing sins. Resurrection happens...we experience resurrection when we release each other. And when we hold on...holding on to each other's sins keeps us in the tomb.

But this story isn't finished. One of the disciples, Thomas, wasn't there when all this happened. A week later he's there. And again, Jesus shows up and says, for the third time, "Peace to you." Then he turns to Thomas.

But before we hear what he says to Thomas, we need to see that this is the third conversation between Thomas and Jesus. None of the other Gospels record conversations between Jesus and Thomas. But in John's Gospel, this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> conversation. And when things come in 3's, we have to pay attention! The first conversation was when Lazarus died and Thomas wanted to go and die with him. The 2<sup>nd</sup> conversation was when Jesus was talking about going to prepare a place for the disciples. "I go to prepare a place for you.... You know the place I'm going," he said. And Thomas answered, "No we don't."

Now here in their 3<sup>rd</sup> conversation we hear answers that give new meaning and deeper layers to what Jesus has been teaching and living. Now, when we come and see, we hear that the place Jesus was preparing for us was resurrection life. The preparation for resurrection is dying. Metaphorical and spiritual dying. We get stuck thinking about death and resurrection because we only imagine literal, biological death. But Jesus is talking about a way and a truth of living, spiritually, metaphorically, body and being. This way of living looks like vulnerability. It's defenselessness. Jesus physically and biologically died on the cross. But he was dying long before that. There was a kind of dying in the way he lived, choosing to be with those on the margins, the lowly rather than seeking elite social circles. There was a kind of dying when he, the master and teacher, lowered himself to wash the feet of his students and disciples. There was a dying when he chose to keep loving Judas and Peter, knowing they would betray and deny him. There was a dying when he stood, defenseless, in front of his accusers. Again and again, Jesus chose to open his heart, extending love, each time letting his defended-self die, each time releasing the sin of the other.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> conversation between Jesus and Thomas isn't about Thomas doubting the resurrection. What Thomas cannot believe is that Jesus is bearing the wounds of death. Thomas, and we, expect the resurrection to magically disappear pains and wounds and

death. But what we witness in this encounter between Thomas and the resurrected Christ is that the way of resurrection is *through* our wounds, *through* death. It is the way, the only way. It is the truth of resurrection life.

Resurrection isn't something that happens between us as individuals and God. It isn't about my body being dead and then not dead. Rather, resurrection is about a way of living, a way of loving. Resurrection is about trusting the Holy Spirit of God. Resurrection is about releasing...forgiving and releasing our defended selves...releasing and forgiving each other's defended selves. Resurrection is a way of living as a loved and beloved community, a way of living with our arms open, sharing our wounds, defenseless.

Remember at Lazarus' resurrection? When Jesus called him out of the tomb, Lazarus came out. And then Jesus said to the community that had gathered, "Unbind him and let him go." Or, "unbind him and forgive him." Jesus had called Lazarus out of the tomb, but as long as Lazarus was wrapped up in the bindings of his own sins and the sins of others, he wasn't fully alive. As long as we are wrapped up in the bindings of our defended selves and each other's defended selves, we cannot experience the fullness of resurrection.

But the resurrected Jesus has given us the power to forgive. So when we unbind and forgive each other, we are joining God's resurrection power. When we love and trust each other enough to open and show our wounds to each other, we are releasing God's resurrection power. When we let go of our defended selves and stand defenseless with each other, we are standing in the power of resurrection. Not only on the first day of the week, but on Monday morning...and every day of the week.

The Holy Spirit of God is breathing resurrecting life into us. And when God's Holy Breath is in us, we are free to be at peace. A peace we can trust. A peace that opens our arms, releasing and forgiving ourselves, releasing and forgiving each other.

May the resurrected Jesus find us....

May we hear the Christ speak peace...may we feel...and know the peace of Christ in our bodies and beings...

May we see Christ's wounds...touch them....

May the resurrected Victim come close...very close...creating us...re-membering us into new life.