

“Resurrection Is”

In her reflection, *Resurrections* (Quest, April 2010, p. 3), Barabara Pescan, parish minister, Unitarian Church of Evanston, Illinois wrote:

I collect stones, and now also beach glass, as we walk with our dog along the lake. When we moved to Evanston I jettisoned many pounds of rocks from other places---Berkeley, Big Sur, Provincetown, Ferry Beach, Star Island---and kept only a few. I forget where most have come from, but when I look at them and hold them I cherish the sense of history and pleasure emanating from the colors and textures of their faces. This winter, as the anniversary of my dad’s death approached, I wondered what I would feel. He had been diminishing for twenty years through the slow erasure that was his Alzheimer’ disease, so when he died, I cried, but I had wept so deeply so many times before, I felt my mourning must be over. So, in January and February, I wondered. Then I forgot about it. I began to miss Connecticut like crazy---the walks in the forested hills near our house, the little house itself, with its too-much yard work, and its constant needs for fixing we just didn’t have the skills or time for. My sadness grew, and I couldn’t figure it out: I am happy here. I love the lake and our apartment, and I love this church and congregation. But I felt such a mournful missing of that home. When March 2nd came, I understood that missing Connecticut was mourning my dad again! It had come at me side-ways, but that’s what it was. When he was my age and younger, and healthy, he loved hiking with our various dogs. When he mowed the lawn, I was sent ahead to clear the way of sticks and stones. Imperfect putterer that he was, he could spend a whole day figuring out some home maintenance problem---taking lots more time than you’d think a mechanical engineer would need, probably enjoying the solitariness of problem and material---being with himself. Dad also collected stones---on his walks his eye would be caught by some small wonder and he would take it up to bring home to show it to me, and to keep it.

I am my father's daughter--- all our arguments and misunderstandings not-withstanding, that is who I am. And, though he is dead, he lives on in me---in my memory and in my gestures, in the things with which I struggle, in my collections of small wonders, and in my enjoyment of poetry and music, even in my voice, this aging soprano sweetness that his tenor genes, combined with my mother's alto genes passed them on to me. If this is not resurrection, I do not know what is. Bodies do not survive death. If minds and souls do, I do not know where they gather. But I know that love is stronger than the grave. It survives, and it abides, and all the dead rise again and again in us, giving themselves to us for as long as we will receive.

According to the gospel writer John, that's probably what resurrection was like for Mary Madgelene when she went to Jesus' tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark: missing Jesus, wondering what had happened to his body, weeping outside the tomb, and experiencing Jesus living on in her when she and the angels talked about him. For Mary, resurrection was all this --- and one thing more. Mary saw the Risen Jesus in human form, alive---not a ghost; and, not in her psyche, but standing in the garden. He said her name, "Mary." She knew him, and he knew her. "I have seen the Lord," she told the disciples.

The news of Easter, wrote Walter Bruggemann in "Easter Imagination," is that in the resurrection of Jesus, God has broken all the vicious cycles of deathliness in which the world finds itself (Sojourners, April 2010, p. 48). In Christian thought, resurrection is: God's forgiveness of sin, victory over death, preservation of personal identity, a healed and re-created body, a place in heaven with Jesus, and a joyful reunion with love ones who have died. Each of the gospel writers emphasized a different aspect of these Christian meanings of resurrection. John favored the power of Love in bringing us back home to the heart of God. When Mary tried to hold onto her teacher, Jesus said to her: "Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

In poetic verse, James Lowry imagined what belief in this part of Jesus' resurrection means for us. At the end of his sermon, *The Gardner*, he wrote: For John,

 So unlike all the others in many, many ways,
 the most unique emphasis among many unique emphases is
 That Jesus came from God and Jesus is going to God.

 "Don't hold me," said Jesus.

 "Tell the church I'm going to God and I'm taking you with me."

 Is it not natural as we understand nature.

 It is not logical as we understand logic.

 It is not scientific as we understand science.

 But it is the truth . . . truth as we believe it . . . or as we long to believe it.

 "I'm going to God and taking you with me . . . "

 "I'm going to God and taking you with me . . . "

 It is the truth of something that happened a long time ago.

 "I'm going to God and taking you with me . . . "

 it is the truth of something that happens still.

 "I'm going to God and taking you with me . . . "

 It is the truth that banishes fear.

 "I'm going to God and-taking-you-with-me . . . "

 It is the truth that silences guns.

 "I'm-going-to-God-and-taking-you-with-me . . . "

 "It is the truth that sets all things right.

 "I'mgoingtoGodandtakingyouwithme . . . "

 It is the truth that sets us free.

 "I'm going to God and taking you with me . . . "

 It is the truth that lets us look in the *empty tomb* (*caskets*).

 And be sad . . . oh yes . . . very sad but not defeated.

Resurrection is renewed and transformed life in Christ lived in a world that is still organized around death, fear, and guilt. This Easter, may it be the faith that frees you from these powers and strengthens you to love as Jesus loved. He is Risen and Jesus is Lord! Amen.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. The other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" and she told them that he had said these things to her.