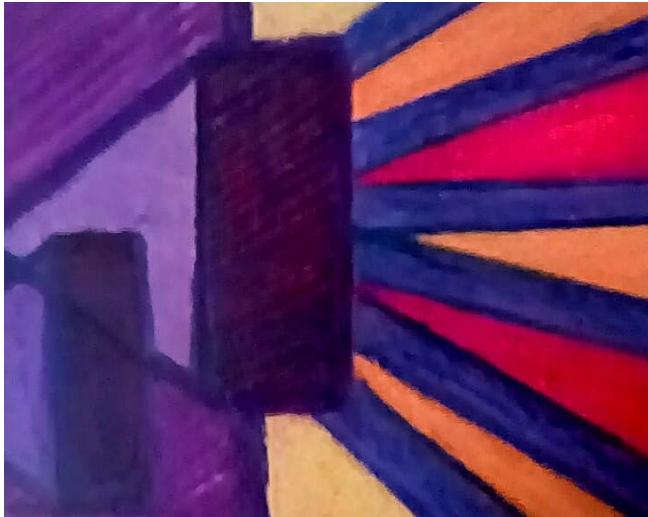


“What Does Resurrection Look Like” by Marjory Bankson

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pastel drawing by Martha Phillips

Easter Sunday

What Does Resurrection Look Like? To you? To us – today? Be holding that question as we turn to the text for this Easter Sunday.

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene made her way through the shadows to the tomb where Jesus lay wrapped in linen cloths. The horror of what she had seen of his slow death weighted each step. She barely thought about how she would move the heavy stone that sealed the entrance. Why hadn't she asked Peter, or John to come? She only knew she had go, to be close to his final resting place.

Only John tells the story this way: that two high-ranking officials, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus at night, had asked Pilate for Jesus' tortured body before their Sabbath began – had treated it with spices, wrapped it in linen cloths and laid his body in a fresh tomb –

not stacked with others. Mary had seen it all, standing with the other women throughout the agonizing ordeal. But now she came alone, drawn there by love and grief.

Imagine her shock when she saw the stone had been rolled away! The answer was obvious. THEY had taken his body. She thought she knew what had happened.

She ran to get Peter, still locked away with the other disciples – to be safe from the soldiers. Peter and another, presumably John, come back with her. Their adolescent rivalry creeps into the story here: they race to see who will get there first. It's just a short sprint. One wins, but the other goes into the tomb. Peter notes that the head cloth is rolled up and put off by itself. That strange detail suggests purpose, intent – by whoever had taken his body.

The text makes it clear that the other disciple saw the empty tomb and “believed,” but did not yet understand what was happening. Then both men go back to their hiding place, leaving Mary there – alone.

Are they running to get the other men? The text doesn't tell us. But the men are clearly not worried about Mary as she stands weeping outside of the tomb. The first scene ends here, still in the dark – with fear and despair piled on top of their terrible loss. Jesus is dead – and his body is gone. THEY have desecrated even this tomb. The tomb is the end of their journey with Jesus.

After the disciples leave, Mary bends down to look into the tomb, to see for herself. Only then do the angels appear, brightening the cave with their shimmering light. “Why are you weeping?” they ask.

The angels are the bridge from the closed, either-or world of

life and death, to something more, as yet unknown. We can almost hear the angelic greeting, "Fear not, for behold..."

Dawn begins to brighten the sky. The story opens again. A man appears, outside of the tomb. Mary, still caught in her grief, assumes he's the gardener, a cemetery custodian perhaps. She thinks he's one of THEM. But when he calls her by name, "Mary," she KNOWS it's Jesus, somehow alive again!

Being called by name begins her resurrection – because, after all, this is not simply about Jesus.

Then we hear Jesus' poignant words: "Don't hold onto me ... but go and tell my brothers what you have seen." Don't cling to me. Don't hang on to your fear and suspicion, but GO ... and tell the disciples that this is NOT the end. Say that something more is possible. Something more is coming. Bear witness to something new, something more.

What was closed and sealed is now open again. What was a zero-sum situation (if you win, I lose) suddenly shifts – because he spoke her name. Called her to act, to let go of blame and certainty. To offer hope instead. To see another possibility, an opening system, a new story ... expanding with possibility and thus capable of change.

Is this what resurrection looks like?

This week, a group of Seekers met (on Zoom) to begin a discussion of Heather McGhee's book, *The Sum of Us*. McGhee, a talented and readable Black economist, talks about zero-sum thinking as the root cause of racism in many parts of our public life. She says this closed system thinking, "If you win, I lose," stops people from making changes that will benefit everybody.

She's talking about public schools, libraries, broad-band connection and Medicare coverage, but zero-sum thinking happens in our personal lives too. The tip-off is blaming

others – making others the enemy.

As an example, McGhee documents the practice of filling-in public swimming pools rather than integrating them. After civil rights legislation was passed in the 60s, mandating expansion of voting rights and many public services, some communities simply dumped dirt into community pools and shifted to private swim clubs instead.

In the 70s, as other programs, from libraries to housing and higher education opened to include more people of color, suddenly conservative groups got concerned about “fiscal responsibility,” and cut funding for those public services. It has led to the situation we find ourselves in today – with widespread distrust in government and a calculated push against voting rights – the result of zero-sum thinking: if you win, I lose – and I will prevent that at all costs, even destruction of what we both want.

Zero-sum thinking is a viewpoint used to generate fear and hatred of “others,” of THEM. The previous Administration exploited this closed system of thought by scapegoating immigrants, disabled people, and even Black Lives Matter demonstrators. In an odd way, it’s a viewpoint reinforced by sports and video gaming too: if I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. It’s a closed system with no escape – and it can breed despair and blame.

My own Lenten practice this year has been anchored by our weekly vigil in front of Seekers. Until the recent vicious attacks on Americans of Asian descent, we called it the Black Lives Matter vigil. Now it’s the vigil for Racial and Ethnic Justice.

The vigil started sometime last summer at Jackie Wallen’s invitation, and has continued every week since then. John Morris has fed our spirits with music of Black artists, and it’s been a way to see other Seekers in person, even if we are

masked and standing apart along the street.

As the weather got colder and darker during Advent, we shifted from Friday to Sunday, after our Zoom church service. And now, beginning with Holy Week, we've shifted back to Friday at 5pm. Nobody signs up. Nobody is in charge. I hope you'll come some time when it's right for you.

On Good Friday this week, 11 Seekers stood in the cold wind, bearing witness to the possibility of a more just society than what we've got right now. Someone or some thing called each one of us to be there. We are practicing resurrection. We are bearing witness to the possibility of changing what has been the status quo as a closed system.

My rain-spattered sign reads "Black and brown lives matter" because where I grew up, in the Pacific Northwest, the targets of most unconscious racism were largely Asian and Indigenous people. There simply were no Black families in Bellingham, Washington. As far as I know, there were no lynchings or red-lined housing practices either, but there were certainly racial jokes and a desperately poor local Indian Reservation nearby. When people looked for scapegoats, darker skin was always suspect.

In a strange way, our public life has mirrored the biblical story since the beginning of this year. On January 6th, as a White mob attacked the Capitol, we celebrated Epiphany – and remembered how three kings listened to their dreams and returned home by another way rather than reporting the whereabouts of the baby born in Bethlehem to King Herod. That was surely a closed system for Herod and an open system with Divine guidance for the three kings.

In the wake of the January 6th attack, I began reading Heather McGhee and another book of a similar nature, *Dying of Whiteness*, along with the medieval mystics I had been keeping company with. Nearly every day since then, news of another

shooting crowded onto the pages of the newspaper beside what the new Administration was planning to do about more equitable distribution of the covid vaccine.

During Lent, as the biblical story moved toward the final gruesome week in Jerusalem, I've been aware of the Chauvin trial taking shape in Minneapolis. As people continue to die in the pandemic, and gun violence continues to explode around the country, I've been horrified by watching the video clips of George Floyd being murdered in full view of a small crowd. I've been sickened by the obvious intent of the White officer to humiliate and destroy this particular Black man whom we know now, because of his family and his televised memorial service – and because his death has sparked peaceful demonstrations for racial justice in many parts of the world.

There is something about the timing of this trial – the courage of a 17-year-old girl who kept her phone going for a full record of George Floyd's agonizing death, the fruitless efforts of a White female EMT to intervene, and, I think, the growing presence of a new Administration that looks more like a cross-section of America – that makes this a moment when we can find ourselves in Mary's story – standing outside of the tomb, weeping. As Christians, we may be seeing the depth of terror and injustice embedded in our laws and social fabric.

What does resurrection look like here? Parker Palmer calls this a time of dis-illusionment. That is, the end of our illusions about ourselves, or maybe our families or our neighbors or our country. Dis-illusionment is not a bad thing! It clears space for TRUTH and REALITY. **It makes change possible.**

Dis-illusionment lets go of the past and makes way for a different kind of future – one that Heather McGhee calls the "solidarity dividend," – an open system in which everybody gets a share of the common good. It's an invitation to resurrection, to small and large steps toward letting LOVE

instead of FEAR be our guide.

This IS what resurrection looks like – so we can say together
with Mary Magdalene,

CHRIST IS RISEN!

CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!

ALLELUJAH!