

[As I've been doing through Lent, I've included my own poetic reflections from my left-handed journal into the conversation with scripture. I will note those simply by giving the date on which they were written.]

Empowered through Resurrection

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April 30, 2013

Pretty much by any societal standard or measure, Jesus was a failure. In a culture that valued pro-creation, he defied social sexual norms and didn't marry. He gave up the trade in which he had been trained by his father and left his village to become an itinerant preacher, healer and prophet. Even in that, when he returned to visit, the people in his home town tried to run him off a cliff after hearing him preach. He hung out with people that everyone's mother warned them against--loose women, sinners, extortionists.

He was trying to make a point with that. He was trying to show that every person was worthy simply because we are all children of God, doesn't matter what society thinks of them, thinks of us. He made sure that some of those people were invited into his inner circle of disciples and he empowered them, he sent them out to preach and heal too.

And for a while it seemed like it was working. The crowds grew, his acclaim grew. But ultimately it all fell apart. People started to get scared. It's one thing to hang out with homeless people at the shelter, but it's an entirely different thing to invite homeless people into your own neighbourhood, advocate for a new housing project and have to face the wrath of neighbours. Or to camp out with the Wall Street protesters and face arrest, even if they are speaking out against injustices that impact most of the world's population. It's one thing to protest the pipe line and another to voluntarily give up our cars.

People became scared that they might lose the little security they had, even

though in our hearts we know that security is an illusion and that the best security is, in fact, to stand together.

But Jesus did not back down. And ultimately he was killed in a most demeaning way-- crucified on a cross.

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September 4, 2011

the story unfolds as it's told

love rising to overcome
hurt billowing

come now
walk with me
I will listen your story alive
you will speak me into being

we are each other's,
you know,
that which makes us

you are my gift
I am your joy
the delight of the world

who am I?
how dare you

how dare you not know
that you are God's
wonder, God's creation

roll out the story

roll it out
speak it, live it into being

it's an amazing thing, Holy God
to speak your kingdom
from my mouth

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Jesus did not back down and he knew the likely consequences of his actions. He knew that if he kept pushing, kept healing unclean people, kept denouncing the unjust banking practices of the temple, kept proclaiming the kingdom of God with his life, that people in power would try to get rid of him. So it's telling that on his last night, he didn't lecture his ragtag group of friends about having to be more holy than everyone else or more perfect or even more careful. He didn't tell them to cut their hair and trim their beards. He didn't tell them they had to heal more people or convince more people to follow their cause. He sat with them, ate a meal in memory of the Passover, and then he washed their feet. And when Simon Peter protested and said "You will never wash my feet," Jesus responded, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

In his last moment with his friends, Jesus continued to live into the kingdom of God. He said, "I will serve you." He wanted his last hours with them to be something to help them remember that the kingdom of God comes when they work with God. It comes through them, through service offered in gratitude for all that God has already done. He also wanted them to know that the kingdom of God comes not just through service given, but received. If it is one-way it is nothing. God is about relationship and relationship must be mutual. They must accept having their feet washed, as well as wash others.

And then he walked away a dying man. He already knew that he had failed to accomplish what he wanted to accomplish. While the kingdom of God had been realized in moments, it hadn't caught on. He couldn't quell people's fear. Yet he still didn't stop.

We, the disciples, continue to blow it. We fall asleep and fail to be with Jesus when he need us. We try to fight with weapons instead of love. We run away. We deny that we know Jesus when it's uncomfortable for us.

Or, like the women, we are impotent. We don't run away but since we cannot intervene so we watch from a distance. We cope. We cope because we cannot do otherwise. We cope with the blows and injustices that befall us and others. We return to the tomb with our anointing oils because to carry on is all we can do.

Yet God has transformed the moment.
And God has transformed us.

The crucifixion is important to the transformation. If resurrection was simply about life after death, about mortality, then Jesus could have died in any number of ways -- fever, infection, being hit by a cart, a knife in the back, or even a normal death of natural causes. But he didn't die in those ways. Jesus was killed by crucifixion. Crucifixion was a very political method of capital punishment reserved for "runaway slaves or rebel insurgents who subverted Roman law and order and thereby disturbed the Pax Romana, the 'Roman peace.' " (The Last Week pg 146) His resurrection, therefore, was a blow to those who caused his death. What was at stake was not mortality, but justice. The people in power wanted Jesus dead because he threatened their hold, threatened their power. They wanted him dead because they were afraid that his followers were beginning to buy into his message about the kingdom of God. With the resurrection of Jesus crucified, God stated clearly that injustice would not have the last word.

And with the transformational power of resurrection, we are also transformed, multiply transformed. We are forgiven. We who fell asleep, who ran away, who denied Jesus, who felt helpless to intervene, to make things go a different way, we are all forgiven. We who by our silence allow unjust power to continue, who

fail to stand with the marginalized, who live as if we do not need to stand in solidarity with each other, Jesus takes our brokenness, our own inability to walk firm in the kingdom and says, it's ok, keep going, it's not too late to begin to live it. He takes our impotence, our propensity to simply cope, and says you are fully a child of God, use your voice, use your life. Mary Magdalene walks to the temple as one who copes, and walks away as one empowered to spread the good news, to carry on Jesus' quest for the kingdom of God.

It seems notable to me that when Jesus revealed himself to Mary in the garden, she did not recognize him as her Savior or her pastor or her leader. She recognized her teacher. "Mary," he said to her. She turned, knowing only then that it was him and called "Rabbouni!" Teacher. Which takes us back to his most recent teaching moment, washing feet, when he reminded the disciples how to manifest the kingdom.

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February 27, 2013

Rabbouni

you taught me to laugh joyously

eat heartily

open the table wide

reach out

and let myself be touched

listen deeply

calm storms

and heal the kin-dom into being

you taught me to climb the mountain to pray first

to empty myself so God can fill me

you taught me to stand against systems that destroy humanity

to call the best out of people

to be kind

to give myself

to serve

Rabbouni, teach me

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The resurrection stories in the Bible are the kind of scriptures known as legends. They are called legends because they are larger than the mere story of them. Legends change everything. The resurrection surprises and transforms. With the resurrection we witness God at work in the world. We see even the most hopeless of moments transformed into new life. We witness he who refused to follow expectation, who refused to bend to power, lifted above all. We witness he who was scorned revealed as one most close to God.

If we continue to follow the post resurrection story, we witness people who had stood by helplessly or who had run away, gain new life and truly begin, themselves, to live the kingdom of God into being.

In the Isaiah scripture we heard God say "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth, the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." (65:17) And then we hear of all the good things that will come to pass on a new earth. No infant shall only live a few days. People who build houses will live in them and those who plant will eat. No one shall build and another inhabit, nor plant and another eat. One who dies at one hundred will be considered a youth. Jesus would have grown up very familiar with this vision of the kingdom of God on earth. His whole ministry worked toward it. And while the powerful tried to suppress this work, the resurrection empowered it. We are called through Jesus' life and God's resurrecting power to continue living the kingdom into being.

Rather than just a particular moment, in his Easter message, United Church moderator Gary Paterson invites us to experience Easter as a verb, to allow ourselves to be Eastered. He invites us to pay attention to the things that surprise us. When fear is transformed to new life and gratitude. When tragedy becomes gift. When anger at injustice spurs us to action, to reach out in a way that we would once have never considered. When meeting someone changes us.

Allow ourselves to be Eastered, and not just once or even once a year, but to live
Easter working in us all of the time.

March 26, 2013

As spring blossoms
scenting the air with smiles
warming the grey flowing from my body
to nourish the soil

As spring opens its arms
and turns face to sun
laughing at sky, seeding flowers
dandi and daisy

As the miracle breaks forth once again
my soul sings gratitude
for the truth of resurrection