

WHAT IT MEANS TO RISE

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There is a deep pain permeating the human experience we cannot help witnessing when we pause long enough to pay attention.

Parents and grandchildren of FedEx workers in Indianapolis. The Sikh community across the nation and the world. An entire city in Indianapolis traumatized by its third mass shooting in as many months. An entire nation paralyzed it seems to do anything about it.

There is a deep pain permeating the human experience we cannot help witnessing when we pause long enough to pay attention.

A thirteen year old beloved child of God in Chicago brought down by the bullet of one who was sworn "to serve and protect."

The longest reigning monarch ever, sitting alone, powerless over a global pandemic, mourning the man who was "her strength and her stay."

There is so much pain permeating the human experience we cannot help witnessing when we pause long enough to pay attention.

And that "witnessing" will cost us.

The word in Greek – the same one used by Luke to describe Jesus commissioning the disciples on the eve of the resurrection – the word for witness is *martyres*: martyr. Meaning that when you and I truly bear witness to the pain that is permeating human experience we are *martyred*. We are pained, too.

Neurologists in our own day and age say the same thing. Mirror neurons in our brains light up when we observe the behavior of others, as if we ourselves experience that behavior.

We are pained too when we bear witness.

Imagine, then, this rag tag group of disciples gathered in Jerusalem three days after bearing witness to the cross. *Martyred themselves*, we might suggest, even as they make sense of the martyrdom of Jesus.

And then here he comes!

Risen, somehow. Hungry for some fish. Hungry for some human touch, like we are. Hungry for some hope to linger on for those he has left behind, as we are.

I have been trying to tell you all along, Jesus says to his friends, I have been trying to explain that you and I are part of something so much larger than this particular moment, this particular place, even this particular life.

I have been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, that life for those anointed by God (which is all of creation in my book) *is suffering*. This is not exactly a direct correlation with the First Noble Truth in Buddhism, but what Jesus is trying to say is definitely something similar.

I have been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, that life for those anointed by God (which is all of creation in my book) *makes martyrs of us all*, if we are truly paying attention. Whether it is the suffering of others or the suffering of ourselves. Whether it is the natural life cycle suffering of bodies aging and minds declining or the suffering brought about by systemic oppression and destructive human power gone amok.

There is a deep pain permeating the human experience we cannot help witnessing when we pause long enough to pay attention. We simply cannot avoid it.

What I have *also* been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, is that even though your particular life is so very precious to God – whose eye is on the sparrow and yes, watches directly over you – your particular life is part of something much greater! Life with a capital L! The fullness of creation that is so much bigger than any particular life with a lower case l.

What I have been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, is that Life with a capital L in all of its fullness *goes on!* That the creator of you and of me and of eight beautiful beloved FedEx employees in Indianapolis, that the creator of a beautiful beloved thirteen year old boy in Chicago brought down by a bullet from one who was sworn to serve and protect, and yes the creator of even Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, what I have also been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, is that the creator of you and of me and every other particular life with a lower case l really has not abandoned us to our suffering. Even though I do know – believe me I know – it does often seem that way.

What I have also been trying to tell you, Jesus says to his friends, is that the creator of you and of me and of every other particular life with a lower case l has also planted seeds of healing hope all around us. That the creator of particular life with a lower case l has in some mysterious way created us to *be* seeds of hope at exactly the moment when even hope has died.

This has always been, throughout biblical history, throughout post-biblical history, what it means to “rise from the dead.” Planting and being seeds of hope when even hope has died.

The theology of resurrection, throughout biblical and post-biblical history, has never been about some interesting intellectual exercise designed to stump the academic elite in a checklist of doctrinal beliefs for one particular religion.

The theology of resurrection has always been about our biblical and post-biblical siblings in the faith, who were forced into exile or living under imperial occupation with very little hope for the kind of “systemic change” you and I keep discussing is crucial to the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven, who by all rights could cave under the power that seeks to crush them demanding instead a divine intervention to do for them what they cannot (yet) seem to do for themselves.

The theology of resurrection has always been an intentional act of resistance in the face of despair.

And Jesus is saying, in our Lesson from Luke, that this rising from the dead this transformation of martyrdom into a movement for healing and wholeness and hope is *right here! Right now! With you! With every one! In every land! Beginning right where you live! To the ends of the earth!*

Even if you are not yet sure you can really believe it.

Which is where you and I are today as we pause and pay attention to the pain of the world and to our own. As we gather – “virtually” but still “gathered” – having survived the particular suffering of life with a lower case l

(so far). Not quite sure what to do next. Not quite sure if we really do believe – or should I say “trust” – this whole “rising from the dead” thing.

And that's okay. That's where the disciples are, too.

All we really have to do, Jesus is really trying to say, is keep holding on to one another as we gather in community. And keep putting one foot in front of the other through the particular suffering of our particular lives. And keep reminding one another of the Creator of Life with a capital L, whose steadfast love is beyond anything we can possibly know with our minds. And keep planting our seeds. And keep *being* the seeds. And keep singing to anyone with ears to hear that,

Maybe ... someday ... we *all* will rise!

Let the church say, Amen!