

BECAUSE I LIVE, YOU ALSO WILL LIVE

Easter Day

March 31, 2024

Happy Easter! Easter. Many of the symbols used on this day are all about new life, resurrection life. That's why eggs are such a big deal. We would take those delicious, hard-boiled eggs and color them, and hide them, and hunt for them all around the house and then outside. Hard-boiled eggs, yum! Although, sadly, last night Fr. John informed us of his lifelong loathing of hard-boiled eggs. But the best kind of eggs to find were plastic ones with a surprise inside, usually candy. But, in our family, the best eggs to find had money tucked inside.

Easter and resurrection life, they go together like peanut butter and grape jelly. Very early on that first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. They cautiously entered and were shocked to find a young man sitting there dressed in a white robe. He said to them: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised." In the Christian church we believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Resurrection is about a physical body that has died being brought back to life; either in the same form it previously had, only healthier, such as what happened to Lazarus. Or, in a somewhat similar form to the previous body, but also one that is altogether unique and different, such as what happened to Jesus. We are told that when Lazarus had died, his sister Martha was at his tomb grieving, and waiting for Jesus. Jesus arrived and comforted her with these hope-filled and promising words:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.” In these words, Jesus was assuring Martha, as he assures us today, that through faith in him, we will experience resurrection life after we die.

But being raised refers to more than the transformation of our physical bodies after death. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the word raise as: “to increase the amount, level, or quality of something.” So, to be raised; to experience resurrection, means more than finding ourselves in heaven after we die. To be resurrected refers as well to the quality of our lives here and now.

In the scriptures, Jesus frequently spoke about life. He once said: “Because I live, you also will live.” Because I live – present tense, you also will live – future tense. Apparently, there was a type of life, or quality of life that Jesus had that his disciples did not yet have, but that they would one day have. This future life promised to them has to do with resurrection life. What does it mean for us to experience this kind of life; to be raised and to undergo resurrection?

Jesus one day said: “I came to give life—life in all its fullness.” It is this fullness of life that Jesus was referring to earlier when he said: “Because I live, you also will live.” He was saying, because I experience fullness of life, you will soon experience this fullness of life as well.

You see, you and I are meant to be experiencing greater and greater degrees of life, and wholeness; to be being transformed. To be resurrected and raised to a greater quality of life and wholeness requires

the transformation of our bodies, minds, and souls; to experience something new in our thoughts and feelings and our connection to God. God freely offers each of us the means for this work to happen. God desires to bring resurrection life to us. Other similar words like resurrection that refer to this transformational experience would be freedom and deliverance and liberation and salvation.

In this life, you and I have been called by Jesus Christ to be in the process of being freed and saved and delivered and resurrected. In today's Psalms reading, the Psalmist declared this: "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." As the process of resurrection is occurring in our lives, we are called to declare the works of the Lord, to bring this resurrection life and freedom to others. Here is one example of a community bringing freedom and deliverance to others. Fisk College in Nashville Tennessee was formed as an African American institution in the 19th century. It was established at a time when many African American Christians may have known spiritual resurrection life with God. But at the same time they, along with others of African American descent, were being oppressed and were experiencing much less than the wholeness and fullness of life that God desired for these darker skinned children of his. The college formed an ensemble, the Fisk Jubilee Singers. It was established in the 1880's and 90's. Their purpose was to raise funds for the college. But more importantly, they were formed to bring Jubilee, to bring freedom and restoration to all God's children.

One of their songs is entitled "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel."

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
And why not every man?

He delivered Daniel from the lion's den
Jonah from the belly of the whale
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace
And why not every man?

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
And why not every man?

The moon runs down in a purple stream
The sun refused to shine
Every star did disappear
Yes, freedom shall be mine!

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
And why not every man?

And why not every man. God desires to deliver every person from the things that hinder and keep them from being all that God desires for them to be, to experience fullness of life and wholeness.

But this offer of resurrection new life does not just apply to humanity. In God's infinite, and expansive love, God also desired to deliver all of creation from its various forms of bondage and limitation; every plant and tree and bird and mammal and reptile and fish and organism on this

world. You and I are called as well to be about this work of transforming our lives and society and our world.

One of my neighbors Laura is a conservationist. She travels all over performing mangrove restoration, and the restoration of other costal habitats. One of our parishioners, Bob Clark, is active in pond and other restoration and transformation work. Whenever Desiree and I go scuba diving, we frequently see many pvc coral restoration trees planted on the sea bottom. Places and nurtured there to rebuild our undersea reefs that have been damaged by warming and bacteria and pollution.

Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are active in various ways, transforming our world. Fighting against species loss and decay and working to rebuild ecosystems; to bring justice to various communities and systems; bringing freedom and deliverance and wholeness and life to individuals and communities and to our non-human world as well.

Deliverance, freedom, life, liberation, salvation, resurrection. Powerful, glorious words. Words at the very heart of God's Easter message.

Because I live, you also will live.