

Easter is not a day of certainty. It is a day of mystery, of awe and wonder! A pastor once asked, “Why is it that so many people come to church on the one Sunday that the message is perhaps the most incredible?! (A person was dead for two nights and rose from the dead on the 3rd day!) I scratch my head every Easter hoping for a real life example that will show a miracle, an indisputable miracle, that comes close to healing the blind, walking on water, or rising from the dead... and I always conclude that they are hard to find, and that there never can be any hard core “proof” of Jesus rising from the dead!

So the main point of Easter, for me, is not resurrection as some kind of “resuscitation” of a comatose or dead body. (Though we do hear of many who have had a near-death experience and come back to tell about it.) Resuscitation from a coma or momentary death may or may not happen to us or anyone we know, and there will always be an end to our physical self. So again, Jesus coming back to life physically... cannot be the main point, nor is that belief a necessity for experiencing the Divine Spirit.

The lasting power of the Easter story really has more to do with *Spiritual* resurrection... in Jesus, and available to all of us. Resurrection Spirit is a Spirit of Renewal and Rebirth, that is stronger than any forces of destruction and death. It is an undying spirit for Good, a spirit of Love that can never be extinguished, a Spirit that exists continually to give new birth and new life! This is resurrection spirit, and resurrection power!

For this, there is indeed evidence, or proof. Of course *nature* is a prime example of renewal or rebirth. Right now, we see little sprouts of green and even some early flowers coming up after seeming to be dead all winter. How did that happen? A mystery, that winter did not extinguish that force of life. All the birds returning from miles and miles

away, and all the animals that are coming to life after hibernating for the winter.... how does this happen? It's a *mystery*.

While nature is a prime example of new life being born from hibernation and death, how about new life and new birth in our human lifetimes? Again, it is amazing how every stage of life has some sort of loss, which is accompanied however by a transition to something new. And I dare say that LOVE is involved in every good transition! Love is part of the resurrection power.

Babies cry, seeking comfort, and it is the Love of a parent that learns when to feed them, when to change them, and what signs are really calling for sleep. Toddlers trip and fall, crash their bicycles, get cuts and scrapes and cry like it is the end of world, but first-aid wisdom and Love quickly start a healing time. Elementary age children experience that others in the world can be mean and mean-spirited. (I'll never forget the first day of first grade, the burly boy in line behind me says "I bet I can beat you up, kid!"). But new life came in discovering that our first grade teacher was one of the nicest, kindest women in the world, who had fair rules of conduct, that she would enforce.

Teens learn all kinds of lessons, about friendships, first loves, discovering what are our gifts and talents. For most of us, good parents show stability and love for all those changes. For others, there may be a favorite teacher that helps to guide us. Finding a fitting job or career may take trial and error, giving up old paths and embracing new opportunities. Marriage is a new birth, a new adventure in life. Midlife may bring the awareness that climbing some ladder of a bigger job or bigger house does not bring happiness, and one can be "born again" in valuing the more important and lasting things in life, like loving relationships. Aging brings all sorts of new challenges, as some habits and abilities may no longer be possible and we need to

embrace new ways of being. For many that renewal of life comes through spending time with grandchildren, the ones who so enthusiastically embrace new adventures and new life! Through it all, it is the power of Love that helps us embrace new life!

In the gospel reading for this morning, Mary Magdalene has a resurrecting or renewing encounter with Jesus. It is Love that causes her to move from tears to joy. It is when Jesus calls her by name that she recognizes his Spirit. They were very close, and so she felt a Love that did not end, a Love that came to her in the spirit of his greeting. It is one of the several examples where Jesus makes it clear that he cannot stay bodily with the disciples, but will be present to them only in Spirit. He said to Mary, “Don’t cling to me.” Jesus was clear that he would be ascending, leaving the earthly plane, so that in the future, he would be present as Spirit, what we have come to call The Holy Spirit.

In our reading from the book of Revelation, John also underscores that the Spirit of Christ will keep giving us New Life by living inside us and around us. (“See I am making all things new...” “See, the home of god is among mortals; He will dwell with them.”) It is the same message as the incarnation at Christmas, that the Word became flesh, and this is not only in Jesus, but also in each of us. The Word, or Divine Spirit, is found deep in our hearts; we remember at every communion service that Jesus said, “If we abide in him, he will also abide in us.”

Friends, there are so many new births and renewals in our lives. But the one beyond any other is a renewal of life in and with the Spirit of Jesus, which we also call the Holy Spirit. The presence of Divine Spirit, by whatever name, as “God, or Risen Christ, or Holy Spirit,” is always something beyond or comprehension. It takes us by surprise, it can overwhelm us, with goodness or beauty... like a piece of great music, like a morning dove or cardinal... like a feeling of wonder at the

beauty of a flower. But as I often say, the greatest miracle, a *new life* miracle, is the miracle of Forgiveness. We carry around the weight of too much blame and guilt... on ourselves or toward others. True forgiveness is freeing. It allows people to start over. It allows for mistakes. It requires humility.

Good conflict resolution requires the humility to say “I could be wrong.” And also, “wherever I’ve been wrong or hurtful, forgive me.” Humility is the posture of receiving grace, learning lessons, growing in wisdom, all of which is the process of rebirth and renewal. Humility is an obvious part of interpersonal reconciliation, but oh that the world nations could have more leaders that are humble and willing to learn, thus creating more international understanding and reconciliation.

In the last analysis, even forgiving others, humbly learning from others is all about LOVE. Love is the movement of the heart that gets out of oneself, that considers others, that tries to put oneself in the shoes of others. For human beings, isolation, such as solitary confinement, is a form of torture, a kind of death. Humans are built for connection, built for love and relationships. We all probably have an opportunity today to reconnect with family or friends... if not in person, surely by phone. Even over distances, we are connected by spirit. As Mary could not cling to Jesus in that moment, neither can we cling to any glorious time of worship, such as this morning. We are to connect with Jesus’ spirit, then bring it with us wherever we go. We complete and spread the spirit of Jesus; as he said to Mary, “Go and tell what you have seen.” “Go and tell that there is goodness, hope, peace, love and joy... available here, and everywhere in this world! Amen.