

“He has been raised from the dead.” That’s what God’s holy angel says to the two Marys. “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

Let me pass along a story from Fr. Prior Cyprian Consiglio at New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur. A few years ago, Fr. Cyprian says, a young man started visiting a local monastery trying to make sense of what the monks were all about. He was full of curiosity. The monks patiently explained different aspects of monastic life to him and responded to his questions about Christianity.

Eventually, one of the monks gave him a Bible and suggested that he start by reading the Gospels. After a few days, the young man came back to the monastery, but this time he was visibly upset. Waving the Bible at the monk who gave it to him, he said, “Hey! *This* says that Jesus came back from the dead!” “Yes,” the monk replied, “it does say that. So why are you distressed?” “Well,” the young man blurted, “Why didn’t you tell me that at the beginning?”

It’s a reasonable question. And it’s not like we haven’t been told to tell the story. “Go quickly,” the angel at the empty tomb says to the women: “Go and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’” The women run with fear and great joy to carry out their assignment. And while they are still on their way, the Risen Christ greets them and reaffirms their task: “Go and tell.”

Now, the story of a man brutalized and murdered is certainly lurid enough to capture people’s attention. We seem ready to tell that part. And when we add the detail that this man was also the Son of the Living God, well, telling the story becomes sensational. Matthew’s Gospel even adds an earthquake and stunned guards and an encounter with the Risen Jesus to make this resurrection story the most dramatically spectacular of all the Gospels.

And yet the bits about God resurrecting Jesus Christ is exactly where we tend to stammer a bit. Now, I don’t wonder why that is. I have never been able to dismiss the resurrection as mere fable. But I can remember being more than a little embarrassed about the resurrection part of the Christ event because I couldn’t explain it. That is, I couldn’t explain it *rationally* with any lasting satisfaction.

Now, I have been intrigued by fascinating new scientific studies focusing on the Shroud of Turin and the Suderium of Oviedo, two pieces of ancient cloth with matching bloodstains. The problem is that getting caught up in the search for scientific proof can cause us to begin not explaining the resurrection, but explaining it away. We can lose the plot.

And so some of us simply choose to focus on the Nativity instead. Those stories are so much sweeter, aren't they? A baby and angels and beautiful songs and wise men and, well, you get the drift. No wonder Christmas has become the high point of the year for so many people.

The Christmas story is so welcoming that we can forget something. We can lose sight of the fact that the Gospels are all stories told backwards. The Gospel authors knew something that we *also* know. "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him."

Going back to Galilee is the right instinct, because on the way there we still see Jesus. But *now*, we see Jesus from a resurrection perspective. *This* is the high point of the liturgical year, because without the resurrection, if we remembered Jesus at all, we might remember a baby born under highly unusual circumstances. Without the resurrection, Jesus might be for us just one more wise philosopher and teacher. Without the resurrection, we might remember a political radical who died as a martyr for a noble but futile cause.

But he *has* been raised from the dead.

And so *with* the resurrection Jesus isn't just pointing the way—he *is* the Way. The resurrection erupts like a supernova at the very center of our faith. It expands across all time and space to form the basis for all our hope and the energy for all our love. For Anglicans, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church. We are right to drop our jaws in awe before the mystery of it.

Last night, we baptized four magnificent children – Amiir, Maddy, Yel and Diing – and marked them as Christ's own forever into the one Body of Jesus Christ. Here's what I told the newly baptized last night and what I want you to know this morning: we live in angry and violent times. We won't see much evidence of an all-loving God in the news. It's natural to wonder where God is and where the grace of the resurrection is. Some of our questions have complicated answers and some don't have answers at all. Not yet. But I am telling you at the beginning: "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him."

Going back to Jesus in Galilee is the right instinct because on the way we learn to see Jesus from a resurrection perspective. In the light of the resurrection, we remember God bringing new life out of suffering and confusion in story after story about the life of Jesus. As we mature in our faith, we come to see the incarnation of God's love for us in the form of a helpless baby. But we may wonder why he grew up only to defy our expectations by getting crucified.

God rarely meets our expectations. In the supernova of the resurrection, God exceeds them. Infinitely.

Being a child of God is not an easy ride. There is something about this earthly realm that envies and sometimes hates what is whole and good and true and beautiful. Sometimes, what is self-centered, greedy and power-hungry will even hunt down and destroy what is whole and good and true and beautiful.

Some of our hopes and dreams and good, hard work get destroyed. And God never shows up like some mighty warrior using brute force to stop evil or the pain and death it causes. Because God only uses love and truth and beauty to liberate us. Waiting for God to intervene requires a great deal of patience from us. That's the hard part, *but it is only a part.*

Because what is equally true is that no child of God's stays in the tomb for long. What life teaches us is that sometimes we come out of the traumas of life healed. But what the *resurrection* proves to us is that other times, we emerge from life's ordeals transfigured. God rolls back stones to let new life burst free and we see why the former life had to go away. That's called "resurrection life."

So when life's most painful heartaches happen, don't go looking for life among the dead. Go instead to Galilee. We will encounter the Risen Christ. I don't mean that you should go to the big lake in Israel. The Galilee that God's holy angel told the two Marys about is more than a place. It is also a place in human hearts where God has planted hope and a promise that will grow into a way of life.

Don't cling to the past, learn from it. Look for the Risen Christ in the life that Jesus led and learn to follow what that life teaches. Whenever you are discouraged, whenever your hopes appear to have been crucified, go back to the promise of new life that Jesus still makes to his friends in baptism. Go back to the practices of discipleship that reinvigorate the life of Christ that is within you and all around you.

The love that Jesus embodied in Palestine 2,000 years ago reflects the eternal love of God that brought creation into being and that sustains it. That's the same love God gives to you and me.

We are children of the living God and a sister or brother of Jesus Christ. That can never *ever* be taken away from us. God treasures us more deeply than we can know; no one on this earth is extra or unnecessary. As we live into that truth, even throughout life's hardships, we begin to spill God's love out like Jesus, to free each other from compulsive self-interests. So go into the world and learn, first, how to live. God meets us there.

And then, turn toward Galilee. We will all see the Risen Christ and learn how to live again and again and again.

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