

EASTER SUNDAY

April 17,2022

Here's how the story goes. Jesus dies, executed by an imperial power for preaching resistance and dignity to the oppressed. His friends and family lovingly tend his body and bury him in a donated tomb, dug into the side of the cave. But it's the Sabbath. So these observant Jews cannot do everything you need for for the burial. They wait and lament, and observe their holy day. The day after the Sabbath, as soon as it is light enough, Jesus' mother and some of his female disciples go to the tomb to finish the ritual of tending Jesus' body, sacred work that women do. They know a heavy stone is in front of the cave and they don't know how they will move it. But when they get there, they find the stone rolled away, and at this moment, the stories we have about this miraculous event, diverts; perhaps there was a young man in the tomb, and he tells the women that Jesus has been raised and is in Galilee, back to the north, back where he lived his life and conducted his ministry far from Jerusalem. Or, in the story we heard this morning, there's an earthquake and a stone is rolled away in front of their eyes. And an angel appears before that, and tells them that Jesus is in Galilee. Or two men appeared in dazzling clothes and tell them that Jesus has gone to Galilee. Or it is Mary Magdalene alone, who finds the tomb empty. And when the male disciples begin an investigation, she in her grief, standing outside the tomb, sees Christ, but mistakes him for a gardener. He was that changed, the poet said. And then the stories after Jesus' resurrection continued to be just as mysterious. Here His disciples walk with him on the road, but they don't recognize him. They eat with him, but it takes them a while to understand who He is. He moves through closed doors, he appears and disappears. These stories are powerful, and it's powerful how similar they are despite the differences, and it's powerful that something so unlikely got written down and preserved by the people closest to Jesus. But these are not the stories of people watching their teacher come out of a coma, or be insufficiently crucified or people who are witnessing the magical re-animation of a body. These stories are not straightforward. These are stories of mystery and power. Stories about the limits of death and the power of love and community. This is not the story of Frankenstein's monster. This is the story of what in us outlasts the grave. What in us can be reborn?

There is evidence that even early Christians were skeptical of Jesus' physical bodily resurrection from the dead. The earliest account of Jesus' resurrection said that his body was like air or electricity. In fact, we've heard that same word in the Gospel reading. An angel appears to Mary Magdalene and other Mary like electricity, like lightning, the Gospel says. And at Jesus's time, and for centuries of Christian thought afterward, there wasn't a big separation between the body and the

spirit, or between the stuff that the world is made up of and the life that infuses it. Jesus and his followers, and Christians for many centuries after, thought that all of reality, all of our lives, borrowed from God's Spirit in order to be alive at all. In Hebrew the words for blood and soul, or self, are related so that what we think of as our soul, our spirit, which perhaps in our modern world, we are in the habit of thinking of as separate from our bodies. But Jesus and his followers would have thought that, that thing that makes us who we are, it flows through our blood, it is in our body. Our bodies and ourselves, are made of clay and spirit together, not easily separated. And so in this sense, you can see that rising from the dead as pure holiness, makes sense. That Jesus' power is that there is something in him that outlasts the grave. So I want to invite us this morning to be free from our any fundamentalism we might be carrying around with us in our hearts; free from a fundamentalism of having to believe that Jesus body was brought back to life, and also free from a fundamentalism that says this didn't happen and they're all delusional. I'm inviting us into a space somewhere in the middle, where we can explore what meaning resurrection might have for us in our lives today. Because we don't need our bodies to come back from the dead when our time comes. It is miracle enough that souls can be reborn in this world of heartbreak and sorrow, it is a miracle that souls are reborn every day.

With the war ongoing in Ukraine, I am thinking especially of soldiers right now, when I think of people whose souls may need to be reborn. I think of soldiers returning from war in Ukraine, in Yemen and Syria - everywhere around the world that is blighted by war. I think of our own soldiers who have returned from combat. And some of these soldiers around the world are injured physically during their service. But others are injured morally. Moral injury is a new way of thinking about the trauma that soldiers experience and the work that gets beyond the physical wounds or even post-traumatic stress disorder. Moral injury is the damage done to someone's conscience or moral compass, when a person has to perpetrate witness or failed to prevent acts that transgress what they believe to be right. And in the context of military service, people may have to transgress what they believe to be right without much choice in the matter - having to follow an order, having to act in the heat of the moment, having to protect a fellow soldier. Moral injury can cause lasting damage, similar to the effects of PTSD that comes from a physical source. Kurt Vonnegut was an author and a former POW, having served as a scout during World War Two. He was held in a prisoner of war camps in Dresden during the Allied fire bombings - one of the greatest atrocities to take place in Europe during the conduct of the war. He wrote about what moral injury can do to people in his book "Slaughterhouse Five". He talked about how the injury of the war divorced him from life and from being able to make meaning of what happened to

him in his life. So then he came home from war, and he got married and had children and developed a career, but struggled to find meaning in those things because of his experiences in the war. In "Slaughterhouse Five" he creates a character, Billy Pilgrim, whose experiences are very similar to Vonnegut's own, And Billy Pilgrim spent some of his adult life after the war in a mental hospital. And Vonnegut writes that Billy and his neighbor in the mental hospital, Rosewater, who are both veterans, and were both in the hospital because, quote, "they both found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in the war." They were trying to reinvent themselves in their universe, trying to make sense of where they were as people. Veterans whose souls have been injured with moral injury often feel that they can't express what they experienced for fear of injuring those they would tell. It took Vonnegut many years to write Slaughterhouse Five. Part of the struggle to make meaning is the need to tell a story and if you believe that just telling your story will hurt the people around you then it becomes impossible to tell. Reorienting toward meaning is how moral injury heals and communities that are willing to listen help the injured with that task - family, professionals, therapists, clergy members, or religious communities like this one - places where someone can speak and be seen and know who they are in the light of what has happened to them - this is like the process of mourning, of coming back to life after a loss in our own lives. We need places where we can grieve and be seen for who we are as whole people - to bring the loss into meaning with other things in our lives. Being loved, being known, being included and held: this is re-humanizing, re-awakening, rebirth. This is resurrection. And we don't need a body to come back from the dead. It is a miracle that people can overcome the trauma of war and suffering; can overcome loss and heartbreak; can overcome violence and horror. Resurrection is not some magic trick that God did once. It is a miracle we perform through the ordinary; miraculous love that is shown to one another.

Every week as I'm preparing for the worship service, I post a question on Facebook that pertains to the worship service, and that is where I draw our calls to worship from - from the answers that people give on that post. My question this week was: What is a rebirth that you have experienced in your life? And I was struck by the fact that more than one person answered: "that being whole and seen and known in their bodies as transgender people was a rebirth that they had experienced in their lives". In fact, a transgender friend of mine shared the question on his own page and got more answers along the same lines. Other people talked about becoming a parent, receiving an organ transplant. But I was particularly struck by this thread that ran through the answers: that being loved into a community that accepted people for who they were, where they could be out in the world as the gender that of their true identity - was a kind of resurrection for them. And that for those

people, finding community and support made all the difference, and I think this is where our bodies come back in to the story. We don't have to believe that a body comes back from the dead in order to believe that bodies make a difference and matter if the resurrection of the Spirit happens to being affirmed in your gender identity. That having a community of people who love your body just the way it is, is part of that. And the rebirth of the spirit becomes the rebirth of the whole embodied person. To say that Jesus' resurrection was a resurrection of the spirit, just like ours means that our rebirth of our bodies, our resurrection, is just like His and in whatever way the tomb stood empty that first Easter morning. Our spiritual rebirths happen during our lives as embodied beings. Our spirit and our blood are one. We participate in the holiness of all things. So this is what we have this life. These bodies, this opportunity to love each other back to life. If resurrection happens here and now, then these bodies matter. If our bodies and our spirits are one, then no bodies are left out. Not black and brown bodies, not bodies at war and home from war. Children are included, trans people are included, sick people, elderly people, privileged bodies and oppressed bodies, those disabled in body or spirit.