



Easter Day (B)

What Is Loved Is Resurrected

[RCL] Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43;
John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

What is loved is resurrected.

That is the proclamation of this singular, eternal day, when the dawn kisses the darkness and wipes away its tears. As sunlight pours itself out into the morning sky, so has the Son of God poured out his fullness, so that in the light of this impossible, wondrous moment, we might finally perceive his purpose.

For Jesus, who is Love Incarnate, has been resurrected, or rather, he *IS* the resurrection, as he once told a grieving Martha, and so now this Love enfleshed that is also the Resurrection of the flesh stands before us, not the finale of a single hero's journey but the reshaping of creation's shared journey: to discover that we are loved and that what is loved is resurrected.

It was not always evident to us that this would be so.

We have traveled a long way to get to this morning. Outward from the original, creative tension between chaos and genesis; outward from the garden of Eden; across a thousand wildernesses of yearning and temptation; traveling along the river and through the turbulent seas, as we have traveled, humanity has sought the one thing it could never satisfy in and of itself: a solution to the seemingly impermanent union of materiality and affection. That what we love... dies.

This has been the curse, the bitten, bitter fruit of inescapable insight: that even if our love—for God, for neighbor, for earth, for self—somehow manages to endure, our bodies and the work of our hands do not. We are burdened with the degeneration of even our purest efforts, our most precious bonds. The inescapable presence of death has driven the world mad with grief, desperate with the longing for something other than goodbye.

But today, in the strange light of Easter morning, a miracle takes place, and not just the one you are thinking of.

No, the first miracle is this: that a disciple, Mary Magdalene, carrying the vast pain of all creation in her heart, comes to the tomb of God, the graveside of all hope, and looks into the void... and yet refuses to yield her love to it. She refuses, there, despite the death of Love itself, to give up the love she carries. She keeps that love alive in her broken heart. And so, on behalf of all of us, she comes to bear witness and to tend to God's broken body when no one else is able or willing to do so because she knows that bearing witness and tending to what is broken is what love looks like, both in life and in death.

And then, in this moment of miraculous tenderness and strength, she is given to behold a new miracle:

That what is loved is resurrected.

Mary did not resurrect Jesus, of course—the upwelling, earth-sustaining, heaven-rending power of the living God did that—but it is also true that this very same divine, undying love coursed through her veins and animated her soul and carried her to the tomb that day. It was God's love, it was God's own heart, in and with and through the heart of Mary Magdalene, who also wept beside the empty tomb, God weeping with her and with us for the senselessness of separation, weeping for that same long journey out of Eden, across the wilderness, through the seas, searching for a perfect union of materiality and affection—a journey that God made, too, right beside us, step by weary step.

And so, while Mary did not resurrect Jesus, we can say that she carried that resurrecting love within herself, that she was an agent of and a participant in its surprising, vivifying force, and that she partook, in that moment of the very power that will, indeed, ultimately restore all life back to its source. And if she does, then so can we.

What you need to know is this: the Resurrection of Jesus is not a remote story of a bygone moment; it is a statement about what is true for you and for me and for everyone who is still navigating that long and often wearisome journey in search of something other than goodbye. For everyone who struggles to love; for everyone who has loved and lost; for everyone who feels confused about what love even is: Easter Day is the answer.

What is loved, however imperfectly, for however long, is resurrected.

This is what the risen body of Christ signifies and enacts: that what is loved is not lost to you, and it will live forever, not only as a memory but in its fullness.

And, as Mary discovered, what you choose to love in this world is imbued with eternity by the very act of loving it. Every time you have gently kissed a soft cheek or held a calloused hand. Every time you have refused to break a bruised reed or trample a fragile spirit. Every time you have preserved the hope of the poor, or sought beauty, or made peace. Every time you have done these things, you have partaken in the

ultimate resurrection of the world, for what is loved—by you, by God, by God working through you—is resurrected.

Why and how is this so? How can Easter be what it is?

We cannot explain it. We need not explain it. Because neither can we really explain our compulsion to love, even in the face of loss and uncertainty, and yet we simply do. Love is its own answer to the questions we ask. And resurrection is the same. Jesus emerges from the fading night, calling Mary by name, calling you by name, to confirm what you already knew in your bones but dared not trust: that love is worth the cost, it is worth having to say goodbye, because there is indeed, something other than goodbye at the end of the story, something that will feel like the place where beginnings and endings meet, where, forever, the dawn kisses the darkness and wipes away its tears.

So, the good news of Easter, that what is loved is also resurrected, means that our task on this day and every day is like Mary's. We must go out into the world, to the gravesides and the gardens and those places where they collide, with the intention of finding miracles, and of being a miracle too—a miracle of love incarnate, the sort that refuses to yield to despair, even as it grieves. The sort of love that bears witness and tends to what is broken, even if we fear, sometimes, that all is lost. The sort of love that chooses to do so anyway.

And as we do so, it is possible that a strange thing will happen, that a strange new Easter light will bathe our vision. We will begin to notice others around us choosing to do the same thing—to love with persistence. We will notice all of the small gestures of care that keep the world going, all the hidden sacrifices that have allowed generations to endure and flourish despite hardship and disappointment and violence. We will notice how there is, in fact, something deeper than just human longing that propels us across the wilderness and through the sea—that our daily choices to seek, to hope, to dream, and to try are not, in fact, futile endeavors—they are fertile ones. Like Mary in the garden, our determination to love is the embodiment of the very same mysterious force that compels life to spring forth from the earth.

For what is loved is resurrected.

Just like Jesus. And just like you.

***The Rev. Phil Hooper** serves as rector of Saint Anne Episcopal Church, West Chester, in the Diocese of Southern Ohio. He is a contributor to several Episcopal publications and a board member of the Center for Deep Green Faith. His sermons and other writings can be found at www.byanotherroad.com.*