

## Practice Resurrection!

Christ is risen! He has risen indeed!

As I was thinking about a theme for my sermon this week, I encountered the phrase, "Practice Resurrection." Due to English being my second language, I needed to figure out what that phrase means. How can we practice resurrection? Is this really a skill that we can improve with practice? I did some research on this, and I came across a book called: *Practicing Resurrection: A Memoir of Work, Doubt, Discernment, and Moments of Grace* by Nora Gallagher.

This book was written from her efforts to find healing and hope following her brother's death. Here is a passage where Nora explains the meaning she has given to the resurrection:

*When I think about the resurrection now, I not only wonder about what happened to Jesus. I ponder what happened to his disciples. Something happened to them, too. They went into hiding after the crucifixion, but after the resurrection appearances, they walked back out into the world. They became braver and stronger; they visited strangers, and healed the sick. It was not just what they saw when they saw Jesus, or how they saw it, but what was set free in them. If there is some kind of life after death, what if it's not a life exclusively for the dead? What if it's a life available to us all, something the living can participate in, too...*

*We spend so much time in the Church "believing" in the resurrection or "not believing,"<sup>1</sup> that we may lose the point. What if the resurrection is not about the appearances of Jesus alone but also about what those appearances point to, what they ask. And it is finally what we do with them that matters; make them into superstitions or use them as stepping stones to new life. We have to practice resurrection.*

How beautiful! Nora Gallagher used the resurrection as a stepping-stone into her new life after her brother's death.

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast.

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**Is there anyone here today who needs to practice resurrection in your life?**

Today's passage (Romans 6: 1-14) teaches us a very important message. Here, Apostle Paul says that every follower of Christ is involved in a threefold sharing in the life of Jesus. This is not a choice, but mandatory for a Christian life.

The first is death. We turn from old habits and patterns, our "old self", with all of its pride, greed, shame, guilt, lust, anger, and hostility, dies with Christ. That former identity is nailed to the cross.

The second is burial. Paul says, through death we experience burial where we surrender to silence, stillness, hopelessness, powerlessness, and emptiness.

Then lastly, we join Jesus in the dynamic, surprising uprising of resurrection.

What is resurrection? Resurrection is something that only happens through death and burial.

Let me share the new understanding I gained during this year's Lenten Bible Study. From our study book "The God We Can Know" author Rob Fuquay explains in Chapter 7, the difference between resuscitation and resurrection.

He said, *"The way some people talk about resurrection, I wonder if many times they mean resuscitation instead. The two are different. Resuscitation means bringing back to life—returning life to the way it was. Resurrection means a whole new life, a different life...I wondered if many times what we really want is resuscitation."*

This phrase struck me so much that I found myself spending time meditating on just this topic. I believe Rob Fuquay is correct, and I admit that I had been confused. Many times, I have tried hard to bring things back where they had been or where I believed they should be. There were times when I have been

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successful returning things back to the way they were or even better. One such example is when my former church was challenged and was about to close the nursery school, which had been there many years. With the help of other faithful people and through many meetings and tough decisions, we were able to bring the nursery school back to life.

But this was not always the case.

There have been times that no matter what I tried to do to bring something back to where it had been or where I believed it should be, I was unsuccessful. They were my own broken childhood, my relationships with certain loved ones, my own hopes and dreams, or hopes I had for friends. Yes, I tried to resuscitate them in my own power and failed.

It is an interesting fact that even though I was not able to bring those things back to life, I did not let them go from my hands. Sometimes those broken dreams or unanswered prayers stayed with me as hurts, bad memories, sadness, discouragement, frustration, even as an anger.

Why did I have to hold onto those broken feelings? Perhaps it gave me a feeling of control over the situation. I remember when I was asked to forgive someone who brought so much pain in my childhood, it was very hard to do; not because I did not want to forgive the person, but I was more afraid to face the emptiness. I think even anger fed me some strength to try to control the situation. So if I let that go, I had nothing left but hollow emptiness.

Then finally I let go of my anger and surrendered myself to God. As a result, for a while I was in a place where I felt empty, hopeless, powerless, even stupid. That was a moment I experienced death (letting go) and burial (letting be)..

The best way to describe the feeling I had was I felt like I was buried in a tomb without any hope, even without the right to be angry at the person.

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In that powerless place, as I only looked to God, there I experienced the door of the tomb opening and allowing me to enter into a new life. A resurrection. My anger and hurts were dead, even though I remembered them, they did not have power over me.

I am always amazed by the symbolism Jesus chose to teach us. The sacrament of baptism is a perfect example. All believers received the sacrament of baptism when they entered into the Christian faith. According to Romans 6, baptism is a symbolic statement that we participated in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Here we usually do baptisms by sprinkling a little water on the person's forehead, but the Methodist Church allows many different forms of baptism including the full immersing of a person under water. As the pastor pushes the person underwater they are to say "you died with Christ" and as they emerge from the water, "You are raised back to life with Christ."

I would like to share a story of my experience with one such baptism. That was my first and, yes; as of today it was my only one.

It was at another church when a gentleman who was about 6 foot 7 inches tall started attending church. Yes, bigger than Brother Diehl! He seemed new in his faith as he had many questions, but he was being very faithful. One day he asked me to baptize him. I was very glad to hear his request, and I asked him if he had ever been baptized? He replied yes, but it had been when he was just a baby in the Catholic Church, and he did not remember anything about it.

I told him that he really didn't need to be baptized again as his baptism was valid as it was. But he insisted on being baptised again. He said it was very important for him, and then shared a little bit from his past. He had spent his adult life in the military. He was a Marine and had served in several wars. It was while serving in the Korean War that he was ordered to kill an entire village of people and burn the village down. He said he followed the orders, and I could see the heartache in his face. "HeyYoung, it was an order, I had to do it. It was more than 200 people. I am a bad person."

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As I heard his story, I realized why baptism was very important for him. He not only understood the forgiveness of Jesus, but he wanted to physically feel the death, burial and resurrection in Jesus.

I agreed to baptize him again, but I told him that it would only be a reaffirmation of his original baptism. I said I would do the entire ritual using the words “I reaffirm your baptism”.

He was happy to accept my offer with this slight modification. Then he told me that he would like to be baptized in his daughter’s swimming pool. It was a challenge because I had never done that before, but I agreed.

I was very concerned. How was I going to lower this tall man under water? Remember he was 6’ 7” tall?? In order to comfortably hold the Bible, the water should be around my waistline. That would only be knee deep for him. Thank God the pool was sloped... but was I going to be able to put him under the water and bring him back out? He was so much taller and stronger than me! So I made a plan. I called on two strong men in the church to assist me. They would hold the man as I gently pushed him under. Then the two men would raise him from the water as I touched him. Those two men agreed but asked me what should they wear? I told them I would be wearing a robe but that they could wear swimming suits.

When the day finally arrived for the baptism I went to the pool and found every edge of the pool was filled with guests. It was so crowded I could not enter the pool without asking some of the people to stand up to make an opening for me. Then the unexpected happened. Something I had not planned on. As I entered the water my robe began to float and danced on the surface of the water.

With my dancing robe, I spoke; “Joe, you died with Christ” successfully he was immersed into the water. After a moment of quietness, which represents the burial, he came out as I said, “Joe, you are resurrected with Christ.”

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Resurrection, God's gift, indeed freed him from those haunting memories of his old life.

How about you? Are you free from your old self?

We have all heard the news of Jesus's resurrection.

It is God's desire to let his resurrection be yours as well. You too can be free if you choose to practice the resurrection!

Let's move beyond fear and be alive with Christ! Amen!!