

Easter Sermon 2012
Holy Covenant Jamison

Story of the waiter in Kingston who argues with his wife over which is more important, Easter Day or Good Friday...

On Easter Sunday, We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, an event many consider to be the centrepiece of their faith. But Easter is more than just a day. What happens when we think of it as a verb? Then the resurrection becomes a spiritual practice in daily life, don't you think?

Easter: Resurrection as a Spiritual Practice By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/days/features.php?id=10963>

Bishop Trevor told this story at the Quiet Day last Tuesday:

Those who made part of the Broad Street congregation never forgot that electric Sunday in 1846: the gas jets, dancing on whitewashed wall, the minister the Rev. Samuel Dunn, seated comfortably on his red plush throne, a concord of voices swelling into the evening's fourth hymn:

Foul I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

The chapel's outer door suddenly shattered open, engulfing a white scarf of fog. In its wake came a shuffling shabby contingent of men and women, wilting nervously under the stony stares of mill-manager, shop-keepers and their well dressed wives. In their rear, afire with zeal, marched 'Wilful Will' Booth, cannily blocking the efforts of the more reluctant to turn back. To his dismay the Rev. Dunn saw that the young Booth was actually ushering his charges, none of whose clothes would have raised five shillings in his own pawnshop, into the very best seats; pew holders' seats, facing the pulpit, whose occupants piled the collection-plate with glinting silver.

This was unprecedented, for the poor, if they came to chapel, entered by another door, to be segregated on benches without backs or cushions, behind a partition which screened off the pulpit. Here though the service was audible, they could not see – nor could be seen.

Oblivious to the mounting atmosphere, Booth joined full-throatedly in the service – even if he later admitted, hoping this devotion to duty might rate special commendation. All too soon he learned the unpalatable truth: since Wesley's day, Methodism had become 'respectable'.

This is an extract from Richard Collier's book *The General Next To God*, in which he relates William & Catherine Booth's expulsion by the Methodists, and fourteen years of poverty before founding the Salvation Army. And if by chance you are feeling smug, remember in the century before, the inflexibility and respectability of the Church of England forced Wesley out. It is the sad truth that as Christian bodies 'succeed', they tend to calcify and become elitist.

(Quoted in Bishop Trevor Edwards sermon to Quiet Day, 3 April 2012)

I wonder what our reaction would be if this happened at Holy Covenant today? Some

of you would no doubt recognise some people from St Johns Care, others of us might make sure we have our handbags close. It could be decidedly uncomfortable. Where are the poor today? Certainly not visibly here, though some of us might not feel too rich.

Where is our resurrection practice?

Clarence Jordan, a twentieth-century Christian saint, said,
The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church.

(quoted in Carl Gregg, “Practice Resurrection”: *Progressive Christian Theology for Easter, March 30, 2012 5:00 am*)

Clarence Jordan (1912 – 1969) was born in 1912 part of a large family active in the Southern Baptist Church in America. He was increasingly challenged by Jesus words in the sermon on the mount, and distressed by the racist segregation in the church and community where he lived. He studied agriculture and theology and set up a community called Koinonia Farms named after the Greek word for fellowship or communion. ” He sought to unite his twin passion for agriculture and scripture with his commitment to radical Christian discipleship. This was costly as the local Ku Klux Klan gave them a very hard time.

Koinonia Farms, in time, became Koinonia Partners, which eventually birthed Habitat for Humanity International. Clarence died in 1969 not long after the first Habitat house was built.

I invite you to hear again his words:

“The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church.”

Are we living as if resurrection still happens?

“How are we partnering with God today in transforming despair into hope, apathy into compassion, hate into love, and death into new life?”

The contemporary prophet Wendell Berry challenges us to “Practice resurrection” in his poem “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front.” Here’s a taste of this poetic and prophetic masterpiece:

...

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.

...

Give your approval to all you cannot understand. Praise ignorance, for what man has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest that you did not plant, that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years.
Listen to carrion - put your ear close, and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.

....

Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

(quoted in Carl Gregg, *“Practice Resurrection”*: *Progressive Christian Theology for Easter, March 30, 2012 5:00 am*)

There is so much more to this wonderfully provocative poem, but I continue to be most drawn to the closing line: “Practice resurrection.” **What would it mean to really practice resurrection?**

Peter Rollins has a powerful monologue that speaks to what it might look like to practice — or fail to practice — resurrection. Rollins begins with the intentionally shocking assertion that,

Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ. This is something that anyone who knows me could tell you, and I am not afraid to say it publicly, no matter what some people may think.

After a dramatic pause, he continues,

I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system. However there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and

far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed.

(quoted in Carl Gregg, “Practice Resurrection”: *Progressive Christian Theology for Easter*, March 30, 2012 5:00 am)

We are challenged to ask, 'How are we practicing resurrection?'

Sarah Bachelard who led our Lenten Studies this year reflects:

‘Resurrection life, the experience of the power and joy of resurrection in our lives and the lives of our communities is a gift. It is *God* who raises Jesus from the dead; resurrection is grace through and through. Or, to put it differently, resurrection is as much *kenosis* as is crucifixion – we give/yield ourselves into resurrection just as we give ourselves into death (and this can be just as frightening as consenting to die). Sometimes, our experience is still of waiting – still Saturday – and we know that we cannot just ‘make’ resurrection happen. Any attempt to do so is a fake. Pseudo-joy and pseudo-consummation.’

‘And yet – resurrection life is also a practice – Jesus tells his disciples in John’s gospel that we know the way to the Father (John 14:4) If we keep asking ‘are we there yet?, if we keep saying ‘it’ hasn’t arrived, then maybe we are waiting for resurrection to dawn on us as a fixed state, an object that will suddenly transform us and ‘do it to’ us, without our having to take the risk of beginning to live from resurrection in faith. Resurrection had happened. Christ is risen. So what are we waiting for?’

Like Rollins she gets us to think about resurrection in our daily lives, She writes:

‘Whenever we take the risk of telling the truth in the face of fear, when we take the risk of letting go of cynicism or bitterness to trust again, when we let go of playing it safe to love more deeply or make reconciliation possible, then we are living resurrection life. Whenever in times of darkness and despair we cry to God, trusting that God will hear us, then we cooperate with the Spirit of God praying within us just as the Spirit groaned in Jesus’ cry of dereliction.

So we do know something of resurrection life in our own experience and we know the difference it makes. We know that we are more alive when we love than when we hate. We know that forgiveness, letting go of grudges and past hurts, brings us peace and life, and that bitterness keeps us captive. Love, truth, compassion, forgiveness – they bring life and, although they can be shaken by fear and suffering, they are always the greater power.

So, you see, we do know the way. Living from resurrection is daring to live as if it were true, even when so much of our lives, in our culture, in our church, in our world, makes it seem a weak and foolish dream.’

(handout for Lenten Study 'Inhabiting the Resurrection' Sarah Bachelard)

As we seek to practice resurrection right now in this world, I can think of no better celebration of a Contemporary Christian theology of Easter than Allen Ginsberg’s famous poem, “Footnote to Howl,” which invites us to a celebratory, life-affirming, visceral embrace of holiness in all things:

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
Holy! Holy!

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue
and hand holy!

Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in eternity!
Everyman's an angel!

The bum's as holy as the seraphim! the madman is holy as you my soul are holy!

The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the
ecstasy is holy! . . .

holy the unknown and suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels! . . .

Holy the sea holy the desert holy the railroad holy the locomotive holy the visions
holy the hallucinations holy the miracles holy the eyeball holy the abyss!

Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours! bodies! suffering! magnanimity!

Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!

This Easter, may you open your whole self — heart, soul, mind, and strength — to
God's inspiring call to new life and renewed love. May you feel God luring you,
prompting you, and encouraging you — each day and in each new present moment —
to practice resurrection.

(quoted in Carl Gregg, "*Practice Resurrection*": *Progressive Christian Theology for
Easter, March 30, 2012* <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2012/03/practice-resurrection-progressive-christian-theology-for-easter/#more-1698>)

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