

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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My preaching professors taught me to preach from scars and avoid preaching from open wounds so, I won't go into the details of my the tragic death that touched my family quite close this week, but I'll just say that If I thought last week was hard to find glimpses of Easter and the resurrection, this week has been ten times more difficult.

If you've ever lost someone close to you, you can maybe understand how my mind and my heart this week has felt more like Good Friday than Easter. Great losses and pain in our lives make us want to sit with Jesus at the cross rather than rejoice in the hope of the Easter resurrection. We tend to be more aware of places of crucifixion than possibilities for new life.

Because of this...this week, I find myself relating more to the confused disciples of last week's text than with the sure and confident Jesus we meet this week.

Last week we met the disciples in the aftermath of Jesus' death, the power-lessness of witnessing Jesus' life cut short. And we found them in the midst of the hard work of piecing together their lives and finding a way forward in light of his death and potential resurrection.

I imagine they thought back to everything Jesus said and everything Jesus did and saw it all in a new light. Just like my grieving family shared memories of our loved one who passed, I imagine them racking their brains for all their memories of Jesus, all their conversations with him. I imagine them saying, "hey remember when Jesus cured the sight of that one guy...remember the look at the pharisees face when Jesus did that and how they asked if they were they were blind too...Oh and remember when Jesus said he was the good shepherd not like earthly kings that

want to be exalted but a servant king....Oh, Oh, Oh and remember when he said he has the **power** to lay his life down and the power to take it up again?"

Everything Jesus said and did must have been rushing back to them. And taking on new meaning in light of all that had happened. They were the first of many people over the past 2000 years who have tried to make sense of the resurrection and new life when the taste and experience of death is still so, so strong.

But they were not the last. I found myself also trying to make sense of the resurrection in the midst of death this week. And I learned about another group of people who, in recent history have known this struggle all too well.

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia has grappled with what it means to find new life in the midst of devastation and death for decades- not only for their own lives but for the earth as well. They have published pastoral letters on the ecological and social devastation affecting their communities. They've been ahead of their time warning of the dangers of the Coal Industry... "King Coal" in light of the impact of the mining and mountain-top removal in their communities.

In their 2015 letter, the lay people of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia wrote something that really caught my attention. They wrote: "there are...specific **crucified places**, wounds of Christ in our world that affect both people and the land in ways particular to their locations and that cry out to be heard..."¹

Especially this week, with Earth Day and President Biden's Climate Change Conference- we are reminded of the Earth's suffering. Of the irreversible damage that has already been done to the air and species of this planet. We were reminded of those crucified places. And how in the midst of the crucified places and the wounds of Christ in our lives and in this world, sometimes the power of the resurrection seems far.

¹ "The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us, A People's Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (2015)"
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e0ebce33d6a6002f3105cc7/t/5e1df76b71426f2f292296fb/1579022281302/The+Telling+Takes+Us+Home.pdf>

With Jesus' words, however, we understand that the resurrection wasn't just something accidental. It wasn't something that just happened to have happened. Jesus, as the son of God, had the **power** to take his life up again, after laying it down. Jesus was not powerless, this was an intentional act of love for his sheep, and healing for the world.

The **power** of the resurrection is a **power** to raise and heal that is found in the early church, when the Acts passage, we meet Peter and John being questioned by temple authorities about a crippled beggar they had healed right outside of the temple. Just one chapter before this passage, we read that people would lay the beggar daily by the temple gate to ask for alms. People who passed by that gate everyday probably associated that place with him, averted their eyes as they knew they would be asked for alms in that spot. It was, you could say, a **place of crucifixion**. A place they knew they would see suffering and perhaps feel powerless to help.

But Peter, passing by, stopped, looked at him right in the eyes and said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."² The temple authorities are not only perplexed, but threatened. They put Peter on trial, they demand, "By what **power** or by what name did you do this?"³

Peter responds that it is through **the power** of the crucified and risen Jesus that they were able to completely heal the troubled man. This was a power that the authorities did not understand and could not control, because it was a **new power** for the powerless, a new hope for the hopeless, a new possibility for life in the crucified places of their city and their very own temple.

When you've been in the depth of powerlessness like I have this week- not being able to do anything to change a tragic situation. Not being able to turn back time, to change or take away the suffering of all grieving my loved ones....to not even take away my own pain right now... the idea of power in the midst of powerlessness

² Acts 3:6

³ Acts 4:7

is a thread that I can grasp. A light that I can walk towards. It's a glimpse of resurrection that I want more of.

In the midst of the powerlessness, we feel in the wounds of our lives, the crucified places in our homes, in our communities and on the face of this planet- the risen Jesus invites us to join in **the power** of the resurrection that's waiting for us to know and experience.

Jesus *spoke* of this power before his death. Jesus *modeled* this power as he was the good shepherd for his beloved sheep, laying his life down for them. The disciples *lived* this power as they spent time in crucified places and crucified people and became agents of healing and new life in their world.

The people of Appalachia call it "practicing resurrection." Putting **their power** for new life into concrete actions. In their most recent letter, they say: "We believe that new life for the planet is inseparable from new life in crucified places." We must go to these places, touch the wounds there and then, "following the way of Jesus and the prophets" we "practice resurrection," as we look with hope beyond the endings that these wounds represent..."⁴

Dear friends, my prayer for us (and for myself too frankly) this week, is that we may we practice resurrection as we join Christ in crucified places, in not being afraid to go claiming the healing work that Jesus has already begun in each of us and in **claiming the power** to practice resurrection in the midst of powerlessness.

Amen.

⁴ Ibid.