

Cosmic, Collective Resurrection

Ephesians 4:4-7, Philippians 3:10-12

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There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Abba of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. Ephesians 4:4-7

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Philippians 3:10-12

Resurrection – Easter morning

Jesus Christ is risen today! I forgot to ask Martha to arrange to have trumpets for worship today. Because that is what we do on Easter Sunday, a day in the church when we focus on the biblical stories of resurrection. I could have asked you to wear your best Easter outfits today. Last Wednesday it felt like a warm spring day lately than a cool October. And Trader Joe's did not have Easter lilies, so I was out of luck. There was a moment I thought I should have visual reminders of Easter Sunday so you would be able to focus on Richard Rohr's invitation to go on the Resurrection Journey in chapter 14.

But then I re-read this chapter slowly. I pondered his questions and his new ways of framing the reality of resurrection. We don't need trumpets or lilies or Easter bonnets. We can enter this resurrection mystery, with who we are in this moment. I invite you to explore briefly on the Easter morning stories, the appearance of the risen Christ, and the resurrection hopes of the early church. What does resurrection mean for us today? Why does it matter?

The Bible and the Church

From the very first day, the church had to figure out the mystery of Easter. The disciples were sure that Jesus was dead. They watched him die from afar. They knew where his body had been buried. But then came the troubling reports that the tomb was open and his body was not there.

The women who went to embalm his body told about encountering some angels, but no Jesus. The men didn't believe them. Simon Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. Indeed, it was open, but there were no angels for him. Later that day, two disciples walked a seven mile journey and were joined by a Bible-quoting stranger on the road to Emmaus. It was Jesus. They didn't recognize him until he broke the bread. As they reached out to embrace, he vanished. Then in Luke's gospel behind locked doors, he appears to his beloved friends. He goes to that specific place, to those specific people, just as they are discussing these reports of

resurrection. Jesus stands among them, as if he knew exactly what they discussed and knew exactly where they were. One second he was out of sight, another minute he was right there.

The Easter Church has to figure this out. The Resurrection is a mystery. It's a new way of life. Jesus is alive, but he is mostly out of sight. He knows what his "church," his community, is talking about, and he comes and goes. And he keeps speaking. Luke says the Christ opens the scriptures and opens the minds of his disciples to understand them.

Rohr's Deeper, Broader, Collective Resurrection

So the church has tended to focus on the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. One person, one embodiment of the Holy. Rohr makes the case that what he is trying to communicate in *The Universal Christ* is that at the deepest intuitive level there is a collective, connected, One Life, One Death, One Suffering on this earth. This points to One eternal source of Love, One web of life, One interconnected human family and creation. He calls this the "one lump" awareness of reality.

He proposes that all suffering (and all crucifixions of violence, hate, abuse) will one day be transmuted into the "one body" of cosmic resurrection. (page. 169) He wants to enlarge our view of resurrection — from a one-time miracle in the life of Jesus that asks for acceptance and belief, to a pattern of creation that has always been true, and that invites us to much more than belief in a miracle.

For Paul, according to Rohr, the reason we can trust Jesus's resurrection is that we can already see resurrection happening everywhere else. People are alive in this love, in this grace, in this healing and hope. Communities committed to Jesus' teachings can and do embody this resurrection. It is collective. The living body of Christ.

"Resurrection" is another word for change, but particularly positive change — which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death. Jesus' first incarnate life, his passing over into death, and his resurrection into the ongoing Christ life is the archetypal model for the entire pattern of creation.

It is interesting that for Rohr, as a Franciscan priest rooted in Christianity, does say that he does believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. He says this is because it affirms what the whole physical and biological universe is also saying and grounds it as something more than a mere spiritual or miraculous belief. Matter matters, as Rohr and others say.

As you consider your experience of resurrection and your beliefs, where are you today? For many people I talk with, the biblical Easter stories are foundational for them. Jesus suffered, died on a cross like a criminal, was laid in a tomb and then his body was not there. And then his followers saw or heard or felt his presence in ways they could not explain. And then there was more.... The resurrection was a reality in people and creation. A continuation of Divine

love and life for all people. For others, the Easter story is a myth. It is symbolic. There is truth there. I don't think you need to be one or the other. It is a mystery. But if we are taught it is only one person who was resurrected, Rohr would say – No. That is not what biblical writers or theologians or people of faith have experienced.

Resurrection, Clarence Jordan and New Life

Some of you may have come today wondering about proof of the resurrection. I can't give you that. You can find preachers who will try. What I will say is the resurrection is present in the earliest writings in the New Testament. There's no doubt Jesus' followers had experiences of him after his death. So what can we say about Jesus' death?

What God did on Easter was to make beauty out of the worst of what humanity is capable of. Thankfully, beauty is not just up to us to make. It's all around us. Beauty, holy beauty, is resilient. It comes back. Every time a flower returns, we should recognize it as a miracle. Philip Newell reminds us, "Anything that is of God, even though pushed to the ground, will come forth again. Anything that is true, anything born of love and compassion, anything filled with true vision for justice will rise again." (1)

Do we now recognize the Christ, and the beauty Christ made, the love Christ made with the world? Will we join in that? Richard Rohr is saying we are the living Body of Christ and we practice and participate in the resurrection. What does that look like?

Clarence Jordan was born in Talbotton, Georgia in 1912, the seventh of ten children, to a Southern Baptist family. It was at church that he learned racial equality, though he didn't see it in his society. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in New Testament. He later authored "The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John", a reimagining of the Jesus story in rural Georgia in the first half of the 20th century. That was later turned into the musical the "Cotton Patch Gospel," written in part by Harry Chapin.

In 1942, Jordan founded Koinonia Farm, which exists to this day. Koinonia is Greek for fellowship, communion, sharing. Koinonia was his attempt to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously. Koinonia is engaged in sustainable farming, and has also been involved in peace work and housing, launching what would eventually become Habitat for Humanity.

Jordan, who chose to try and manifest the gospel in his life, said this, "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." (2) I love that.

People since the beginning have obsessed over whether people carried Jesus' body away, when what we should be concerned about how we, as the living body of Christ, are willing to get carried away. What would it look like when we are bit carried away with Sunday morning

that is overflowing with great music and spiritual sturdy hope? What might it look like if we got carried away with invitations to people for contemplative spiritual practices and worship? What would it look like to be a sanctuary for those searching for a spirituality that is here to cultivate beauty compassion rather than reign down threats and judgment? We have the ability to birth to beautiful things. What is the Spirit doing among us that feels like resurrection?

Resurrection People

The world has its share of promoters of revenge, of violence, of crucifixions. What the world needs is disciples of resurrection, students of new life, practitioners of shalom, God's peace lived out on earth. I have given you the example of Clarence Jordan as someone living the resurrection life. And that is good. But he would say his goal was to inspire others and build a community of resurrection people.

Our default is to individualize everything, something Jesus himself guarded against. Again, Jesus sent out his disciples, a community of students, in twos. What I should do, what we should be doing, is finding and becoming communities of people getting it right.

We are to be a resurrection people, forming bubbles or pockets or tents throughout the world where earth looks a little more like the kin-dom of God. We know others have something to contribute to that divine design, that we don't have a patent on the plans, but the way of Jesus does have a special gift to offer. We may have some studying to do. If we are to truly follow the Christ of the empty tomb, we have to learn to practice resurrection as a people. (3)

We can feel the sadness and grief of what is happening in the world. We can weep with families in Israel and mothers in Palestine. We can condemn the Hamas terrorists whose horrific violence has taken so many innocent lives. We don't want the cycle of violence and revenge to escalate.

We gather today in person and online and through the week to practice resurrection. And to allow this collective resurrection to be a source of hope even when it is hard.

Let's become examples. Let's put our God-given imagination and creativity to use for ways that offer hope. That's part of what it means to be a resurrection people. We are the living body of Christ. Amen.

Primary source

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), pp. 169-187

1) John Philip Newell, *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2021), 118.

2) <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2012/03/practice-resurrection-progressive-christian->

3) Rev. Rob McClellan, "A Resurrection People," April 2023

<https://www.wpctiburton.org/resources/sermons/a-resurrection-people/>