

SHARING RESURRECTION
John 20:19-31
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Our gospel reading for today comes to us from the Gospel of John chapter 20

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week (that would be the first Easter Sunday) and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Now of course Thomas misses the whole thing and his response is: yeah right... I need to see *that* for myself... and so the story continues...

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Well there's more to the gospel than that, but that is more than enough for now.

Growing up, I was taught *to believe*, among other things, that Jesus is the Sun of God. Except in my childlike, and perhaps genetically pagan brain, I always heard this as S-U-N. Sun of God. And it made perfect sense (to me!) because Jesus is also the light of the world. On Easter Sunday, which we celebrated at sunrise, Jesus came back. Halleluiah!

I have over time come to a renewed appreciation for this childhood image of Jesus, especially in light of our recent exploration of the Cosmic Christ of evolution—that Spirit of infinitely creative power, Divine Love incarnate that has been rising for almost 14 billion years, in the words of Ilia Delio. Sr. Ilia is a brilliant Franciscan theologian, scientist, teacher and was my advisor in seminary—and I always loved the religious iconography on the walls of her office that all came from a single holy source: the Hubble telescope.

So my s-u-n may be cosmic, but I still think it is a better image than so many alternatives. Driving the back roads of our county this Holy Week, I saw a church sign that said: *If you do not know Jesus, you are headed to hell.* Wow: And also with you... (but, *what*)?

Which Jesus are we talking about here? There are, it turns out, many images of Jesus in tradition, and this Easter season seems like a pretty good time to take a closer look. Having claimed and celebrated the Cosmic Christ, we will now re-turn and meet Jesus again. Beginning next Sunday between services, we will be exploring together Marcus Borg's book *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. So I invite you all to read, reflect, pray, and, if you can, join us for what I am sure will be another great adventure.

Images of Jesus, it turns out, are important. Scripture itself tells us that Jesus is the icon—image, of the invisible God “firstborn of all creation in whom all things were created.” (Cosmic Christ, right there in Colossians.) So our images of Jesus matter, because they tell us about God. And images of God matter, because they form us. Angry and judgmental deities have this nasty habit of forming angry and judgmental followers.

Borg’s book begins with the invitation to take another look at what is going on with Jesus in the gospel stories, in order to take another look at what is going on with Jesus in our own lives and experience. The whole point of Christian life, he insists, is not about *believing stuff*, or just *being good*, it is primarily about relationship with the Holy that involves us on a journey of transformation—a resurrection journey, you might say. The human one Jesus—that Borg invites us to distinguish from the post Easter Christ—never said worship me, he said follow me, which is to say, trust in God and love the world for all its worth.

Borg reminds us that the Gospel stories – written down decades after the events they explore--were *never intended* to be history or biography. These are stories of faith, meant to inspire faith, not journalistic **accounts**. This is underscored by the fact that we have four different gospel stories, in four different voices, from four different historical periods and distinct communities. For Borg, this is not a problem to be solved, but a great opportunity to be explored. Built right into our tradition is the *experience* of different ways of encountering the Holy and different ways to practice the faith.

If I had a quarter for every article I’ve read recently that began: **all Christians must believe**—now fill in the blank with your favorite doctrine, preferably the ones guilt and sin—if I had a quarter, I could take us all to lunch. It’s a claim made by both religious and non-religious people, and it is fundamentally flawed. It disrespects the diversity of the tradition, ignores the long and colorful evolution of Christian spirituality over 2000 long years, and is, inherently, presumptuous. No one gets to define for me—or for you--the content of faith, which is to say the source of trust in life.

The notion, for example, that Jesus died to pay the price of original sin to an angry God to save us from eternal damnation may be popular these days, but its only several centuries old. So it can’t be the only way to be Christian unless we are willing to ignore both the biblical record and the first 1000+ years of Christian experience. And even after this doctrine went mainstream in the institution, there remained a strong, unbroken, alternative stream taught by mystics, prophets, and other bold lovers of the world, who continued to insist: it can only be about love.

Take, for example, the English mystic Julian of Norwich, who lived in the 14th century, one of **the** darkest times in human history. A bitter civil war raged through the countryside, and if starvation and violence didn’t get you, the Black Plague surely would. Julian watched. And prayed. And agonized over the terrible suffering that she witnessed all around her. And, unwilling to accept the angry God excuse, she demanded of Jesus some better answers. Why? Why sin? Why suffering? In a series of near-deathbed visions that then she spends her whole life trying to understand she says: “our good Lord answered with tender love.” He assures her that sin, suffering,

and pain are part of the whole **and** “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” This in a nutshell, according to theologian Frederick Buechener, is the true meaning of resurrection.

Julian spent her whole life trying to make sense of her Jesus experiences. She kept praying, asking and listening. And eventually this answer came: “would you know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well: love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Wherefore did he show it you? For love... thus was I taught that love was our Lord’s meaning. And I saw full sure in this and in all that before God made us he loved us; which love was never slaked nor never shall be. And in this love he has done all his work; and in this love he has made all things profitable to us; and in this love our life is everlastingly fixed.”

We know next to nothing about Julian’s life apart from her profound book, which is also the first book written in the English language by a woman. Still, it was largely lost to history---she was after all *just* a woman, and a mystic to boot—until late in the last century when the power and wisdom of women and mystics got resurrected. Since then, Julian has exploded across the globe spreading her message of divine love.

Love stronger than death. The Risen One in John’s resurrection stories shows up, repeatedly, always bearing assurance, peace, and life, the breath of new life, a direct reference to creation itself. His presence is always unexpected, and seems to happen most often right smack in the middle of deep darkness, confusion, fear and grief.

Resurrection is the *experience* of a love greater than empires, stronger than all forms of oppression inside and out, and more powerful than hatred and despair. Resurrection is our icon of love that is stronger than death. And it begs to be shared: *as my father sent me, so I send you.*

Theologian Walter Wink writes: We are just suckers if we let the reigning intellectual fashion decree that the resurrection is unbelievable... historical is the wrong category for understanding resurrection. The resurrection is not a fact to be believed, but an experience to be shared. It is not a datum of history, but divine transformative power overcoming the power of death. Resurrection is not a contract for a time-share apartment in heaven. It is the spirit of Jesus present in people who continue his struggle against domination in all its forms, here, now, on this good earth. The rest is in God’s hands.”

So, in the words of the poet Wendell Berry “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... Ask the questions that have no answers. Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias... put your faith in two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years... Laugh... be joyful though you have considered all the facts... Practice resurrection.”

Halleluiah! Amen