

A few minutes ago, as we began our worship together, you were invited to share the moments in your life when you witnessed the mystery and joy of resurrection. Resurrection moments in your personal life.

Now, consider this question same question in our communal living – in the larger world community. In realities such as these: (newspapers)

\*"Everything is burning...."

\* China's subtle but intense influence on Canada worries academic...

\* Four dead after targeted shootings in Penticton, BC.."

These sound more like stories that belong with Good Friday than Easter morning but it is to this I invite you to consider – *where possibly is there new life, resurrection, hope when seemingly all hope is lost?*"

As I paced the airport waiting for our departure, the TV screen offered one response from a Catholic Bishop: it is in the ashes of the church's story that new hope, rebuilding and resurrection in fact is found.

Such a response indeed calls for whole new eyes, new ways of seeing, key to the mystery of the resurrection stories in our lives as well as in our larger social, political and cultural realities of today. We need the wisdom of those early resurrection stories to discover the new way of seeing suggested here.

First, I will be bold enough to say, that midst the many questions, doubts, challenges that lie within these resurrections stories, Easter is essential to our Christian story, to my faith. We cannot be sure, we can call into question the many understandings and misunderstandings over time of what the Easter experience was for those early followers, but whatever it was, it was powerful; powerful enough to change lives, to redefine their understanding of God; to begin a whole 'religion'; and eventually to create a statutory holiday! To reach all the way to you and I today, its mystery, a power holding me here within the life of faith. There must have been something big enough for all of that, as John Shelby Spong states in Unbelievable. And yet, it is this power that deludes us even as it assures me of its uniqueness. A power that is worth my giving my all to and for and with.

Yet, even as we recall the early Easter stories within the gospels, so familiar to many of us, we acknowledge their contradiction s– and maybe these very inconsistencies point to the reality that they were based on individual life experiences worthy to written down and passed on to us. If a closer look at these experiences draws you I invite you to join us again on Wednesdays' Holy Conversations. Its truth so much of our stories don't make rational sense – one gospel disagrees with the other; did Mary and the other women *really see* Jesus? Mark says no, Matthew says yes, Luke says no and John says yes! We can't make sense of the contradictory material. Our modern mind is troubled by it; those early ancestors in faith did not seem to be. It is

here I identify. What does the resurrection of Jesus mean? It has to be more than another love story among so many on today's bookshelves. No, for me, it is The Love Story demanding our response.

One of the earliest writers, Paul, describes this Easter story so simply: Jesus 'was raised from the dead in accordance with the scriptures'. That's it. The passive verb! The Easter story is about God's action – God's love story. Jesus was raised by God. To a physical reality? No! Not back into human history but into a death-defying new reality – a new way of being – a new binding with God that we too are part of, that we participate in. There is a new Oneness with God here that Paul shortly after Jesus' death witnesses to that – that you and I are invited to be part of. This earliest of stories understood Easter – asserted that in some manner God had raised Jesus into being part of who God is. Jesus was raised by God into God. (Spong 175) and you and I are invited to see Easter in a whole new way.

What's helpful for me here, and again Pauline wisdom, is the word "appeared" . In Greek the word used is 'orthe'. We heard it in Mary's resurrection story too. The Greek word translated refers to the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and most of us do not see that literally! Eventually the word became to the root for our term 'ophthalmology' – the study of seeing. So then, *what kind of seeing is this?* Would a smart phone equipped with camera photograph that God who appeared during the early resurrection appearances? Not likely for me.

The new seeing invited here is suggested in the unknown prophet of the second part of Isaiah, a section of which we heard earlier. The 'suffering servant' image that in the face of the destruction – the ashes - of the temple and cultural life of his people knew a God who would respond with love. Centuries later the disciples saw this same love in Jesus, a love not driven by survival but willing to give all away for the sake of the other. A love that enabled him, and this unknown prophet, to see God (not vertically above reaching down to earth, but horizontally) in a new way, not as almighty, not even as father and judge of the world, but as the Source of Love itself, freeing all of them and us today, to live beyond our boundaries, loving without expectation of live in return. Here is the God who is the Ground of Being, giving us too the courage to be and freeing others to be all that they too are meant to be! (181) Here is the God who is known to say over and over in our human real life stories, opening our eyes to an new understanding of the God who is found in the midst of life, in love's expression and in the courage to be. *For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth! The things of the past will not be remembered or come to mind! Be glad and rejoice!*

The resurrection for me was this new vision of God who works powerfully among us and through us – who in Jesus took his humanity to a new dimension and so ours too and invites us to rebuild over and over again that one day *the wolf and lamb will feed side by side; that none will injure or destroy again!* The new oneness of all things, all peoples, all that is made it possible for Paul to declare with confident trust: *nothing in all creation can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ*

*Jesus, my Lord.*" This is transformed seeing deeply held within the empty tomb, in Jesus' calling out to Mary, and in her startled surprise propelled her forward to share the Good News with the rest of the disciples. Mary would never be the same again; her *seeing* had been transformed! From vertical to horizontal understanding and through and with all – the God who challenged all notions of death and opened the way to new ways of being and held forever in Holy Mystery, Wholly Love.

This message I stand in trust, in hope, in confidence, in joy that in real life I am invited to transcend the limits of who I am, embrace the Christ presence within me, and give in love to others – to the least of these, and even to those who wish me harm. This is the new seeing of God, of who God is in me, the God is not a noun but a verb calling me to live in a new way. Such seeing calls me over and over to keep moving beyond the boundaries and limits I place on others and myself and see in a new way that *Jesus lives. We have seen the Teacher! And the more deeply we live this calling, the more we can and do make God visible among us* (Spong). This is, I believe, our ongoing work as the followers of the Way, the Jesus way, the Christ way; it is a life-reordering process, not a one-time event long time ago. Resurrection moments all around us as we see in new ways. And the more deeply we live this calling, the more we can and do make God visible among us (Spong).

Let Easter open your eyes. Let Easter's power free you to live fully, to love wastefully and to become all we are meant to be as Christ followers and as a community of faith so that others too may live fully. Life now is expanded beyond our imagination, and love is unlimited. The boundaries of death have been broken. The tomb is empty. This is resurrection!

*Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!*