

## Practice Resurrection

My sermon on April 3<sup>rd</sup> invited us all to give our daily attention to the call of the Gospel to **practice resurrection**. You heard that call from the written words of Wendell Berry. You also heard them from me. These are compelling words to a congregation in the midst of its intentional interim ministry. In the course of our soon-ended Lenten journey, I have seen this resurrection of Ezekiel happening. The Spirit is at work in the transformation of Ezekiel. We have recognized the change that has and is yet occurring here. We have committed ourselves to the transition work of embracing these changes. We are willing recipients of God's transforming work in our midst.

And so, in these disappearing forty days of the Lenten Season, and as we anticipate the life-changing events of Holy Week, we have another opportunity to turn our thoughts, words, and deeds in a new direction. In recent months, many in this congregation have been working diligently to do this, that is, to **practice resurrection**.

At the empty tomb on Easter morning there was chaos, fear, uncertainty, and the human tendency to "**flee the scene**." You and I each know these human tendencies. Reflecting upon Ezekiel's life during these past ten months since the current "**in-between time**" began, I invite you to reflect with me on the Good News that the concluding "**Three Days**" of Holy Week will bring to us to both inform and guide our faithful response to the "**empty tomb**" events in our congregational and individual lives.

As I have stated in previous letters, three words inform our reflection and capsulize what we as the Church of Jesus Christ are about to celebrate again. They are:

**Change:** The inevitable movement of life's forces.

**Transition:** The process by which we must deal with the inevitable changes of life (the interim period).

**Transformation:** The new shape that occurs after transition, toward which change is aimed.

Beyond our thoughts, words, and deeds, here is the very heart of our Christian faith. God acts to **change** the horrible consequence of sin into forgiveness. The process of **transition** occurs as Jesus pours out his blood from a cross on Golgotha. Easter morning and a joyous resurrection present a **transformation** to a new life with a new shape. God alone is the transformer.

Theologically, we believe that this whole movement of change, transition, and transformation through a cross and resurrection is the Good News that is our mission to proclaim. Our congregation's vision is our faith community's imagination of '**how**' we at Ezekiel will proclaim this mission, this Good News of God's victory over chaos, fear, uncertainty, and the temptation to "**flee the scene**." Thus the charge to our Transition Task Force, and indeed to us all, carries within it a reflection upon our most faithful vision of the mission that our loving God has given us to proclaim. Our Task Force is not a Transformation Task Force, but a Transition Task Force. God alone is the transformer.

The Greek word for this good news story of '**cross to resurrection**' is *evangel*, from which we derive the English word *evangelism*. As a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are called to be not only proclaimers of change, transition, and transformation

through our evangelism, but we are called no less to be living examples of these holy phases of suffering, death, and resurrection in our own daily lives. We are called to **practice resurrection** every day, at the scene of every ‘**empty tomb**’ to which we have come. As you regularly participate in the congregational voicing of the Confession of Faith, you are affirming the theology of the chronology of *change* that the last three days of Jesus’ earthly life contributed to your very own faith story.

And so, with conscious awareness of the divine progression from change to transition to transformation, we are called to move ahead in faith. On his faith walk with Jesus, Peter heard Jesus’ call to him as they walked the shoreline following the monstrous catch. As was the case for the fearful and anxious disciples, we too carry with us internal vestiges of the “**empty tomb**” and the persistent temptation to flee quickly from it. Peter fled when he thrice denied his Lord, but Jesus responded with his ‘**triple play**’ question to him, “**Simon, do you love me?**” We are tempted to keep on fishing for fish rather than for God’s children not yet within the fold. In our fear of the new, we are too often too busy retrieving ‘left side of the boat nets’ and in so doing, we don’t hear Jesus calling out, “Cast your net on the right side.” We are content to do what feels safe. We don’t hear Jesus calling us to a new adventure. So, what will be new at Ezekiel, we ask?

In our anxiety about the future, we lose sight of the fact that God wants a hand in our discovery of that future. We need to give God time to be our God. Then and only then can we perceive through the eyes of faith what that Kingdom work actually is. Yet, we are invited to “**stay**” at the scene of the empty tomb long enough to hear the angel proclaim, “**He is not here, He is risen!**”

As an experienced intentional interim pastor to more than 35 congregations, called to proclaim the Good News of new life and hope in God in the very midst of this wilderness time, know that I too do know that transition means struggle. I know that at its best, transition causes anxiety; at its worst, it causes pain. These are the givens of the human condition. While we want to avoid the pain and struggle, and hurry our way through it, our wise God consistently allows us to experience it. My long-term colleague, the late Rev. Warren Schulz said, “*It is as if God has created us so that we grow through change and the transition that accompanies it. Over and over again we are thrust by change into dying to something, sinking into chaos or despair, and then rising again to something new.*”

My prayer for you and for this Ezekiel congregation loved by God is that the Easter message, “*I have seen the Lord,*” first voiced by Mary at the tomb, may be the message that your thoughts, words, and actions unequivocally proclaim every day. **Practice Resurrection.**

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