

Sunday, 17 April, 2016 – Dr. Jane Barter

*Practice Resurrection!* Acts 9.36–43

Over the course of this season of Easter, this season of resurrection, we have heard many accounts of Jesus' continued presence and his miraculous deeds while among the disciples. But this week's Easter story in Acts speaks of miraculous deeds in a different way, as those performed not by Jesus, but by his disciple, Peter, in the name of Jesus. And it seems to me that it is this movement in the dramatic sweep of the New Testament, from Jesus to his disciples, that is incredible news to us today as it speaks to the radical possibilities of practicing resurrection today.

Last week we saw Peter fishing with the other disciples when Jesus appears to them. It is one of the great post-resurrection narratives, and this time, Jesus has breakfast with the disciples on the beach. He shares bread and fish with them, but he also shares in this banquet in the mission that he has received from the Father. And, specifically, he turns to Peter and asks him three times: "Do you love me?" And three times, Peter responds, "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" And Jesus instructs him, three times, "Feed my sheep." Here, in this intimate encounter, Jesus heals Peter—he works upon him so that Peter's terrible denial three times at the crucifixion is effectively undone. It is conquered. At Easter, we hear the trumpets blaze over Jesus' victory from the grave, but this miracle given to Peter is no less miraculous. It is, in fact, the kingdom of God in the mustard seed of Peter's own redemption. Because the promise of resurrection is also the promise that the small deaths that we endure and that we inflict—our denials, our hopelessness, our despair—are also overcome in Jesus.

Peter is also not merely a passive vessel filled up with Christ's grace. He is instead the one who responds actively to Christ: "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" So, whatever resurrection is, it is not simply something that happened to Christ; it is also something that happens *to us* in Christ. And it is not something that happens to us as though we were inert, but it is something that demands our attention and our response.

But there is even more, and this is where today's lesson from the Book of Acts comes in. Peter has come a long way indeed since his breakfast with Jesus on the beach that morning. For now, his love of Christ is lived out in the most abundant of ways, as he himself practices resurrection. Like Christ, he too is endowed with the capacity to heal, and even to restore the dead to life. And so Peter restores Tabitha of Joppa to life in this great story of healing which echoes so closely Jesus' healing and restoration of life throughout the Gospels.

Just as Jesus had done for Peter, so too does Peter for Tabitha. Just as Jesus sees and heals Peter, so too does Peter see and heal the disciple, Tabitha. Tabitha, we are told, led a life filled with good works and gave all that she had to the poor. Peter sees those good works and that loving spirit. And because nothing that is good is ever lost in God, Peter does what God commands and empowers him to do: to practice resurrection. And so Tabitha takes Peter's hand and gets up. This

too is the good news of Easter, and it is true for us: As it was true for Tabitha, as it was true for Peter. That Easter means that we are empowered to be healers, to be comforters to the mourners. To be the ones who see and are attentive to the goodness at work in the world and to help bring that goodness, that grace, to life. We too, because of Easter, are to be practitioners of resurrection.

There is a great poem by Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer’s Liberation Front,” that speaks of this power and this command:

*So, 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.*

Berry reminds us that resurrection faith is a hope that is not of this world. It is a hope that does not compute. It is a hope that loves even when love makes no sense. It is a hope that says to Jesus, even in the harshness and madness of this world. “Yes, Lord, I love you. You know that I do.”

What might this resurrection faith have to teach us today? In what ways might we be empowered to practice resurrection as the disciples Peter and Tabitha did?

I think that we are being told here that there is never a situation in which we find ourselves that is truly hopeless, or a situation where there is no healing that can be brought to it. That even when all hope seems lost, that life—life that is good and true and beautiful—can still rise up. That there is no final loss of those things that are good and true and beautiful. That God makes a way always for life, for love, and that we are to do so too.

Recently I have been participating in a Diocesan conversation about reconciliation and our need to reconcile both with God and with Indigenous peoples given our terrible history of colonialism. And we speak of so many things in that group that requires God’s healing: about the desperation of young people in places like Attawapiskat who are committing suicide at horrifying rates. We speak of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Of the reality of poverty, and third world conditions on reserves. And we speak of this all in light of the intergenerational effects of the Residential Schools that we helped to run. And it is overwhelming. So overwhelming that at one point I said that maybe we need to build a Wailing Wall in Canada where we can lament all day and pray for our healing. And to this, my friend who is on this committee, a beautiful and brilliant Elder said, without missing a beat, “Yes—maybe we can use the wall that Donald Trump is promising to build.” To me, this was practicing resurrection, because my friends was able to inject humour into our despair, and because of it, we were no longer trapped in the kind of sadness that knows no way out. Berry writes:

*Put your faith in the two inches of humus  
that will build under the trees*

*every thousand years.  
Listen to carrion – put your ear  
close, and hear the faint chattering  
of the songs that are to come.  
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.  
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful  
though you have considered all the facts.*

As long as there is life, there is hope. And as long as there is hope, Jesus promises us resurrection. He promises to make us bearers of that resurrection hope, like Peter and Tabitha, and my friend. And he promises us always that love never ends. That it can make its way through closed doors, and sealed tombs and broken hearts.

*Go with your love to the fields.  
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head  
in her lap. Swear allegiance  
to what is nighest your thoughts.  
As soon as the generals and the politicians  
can predict the motions of your mind,  
lose it. Leave it as a sign  
to mark the false trail, the way  
you didn't go. Be like the fox  
who makes more tracks than necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.*

**Amen.**