

The Day of Resurrection 2011 Nigel Taber-Hamilton

In almost every language but English, this day is not Easter – that name comes from the Pagan high-German goddess Eostre. In pretty much every other language, this day is Pascha. – it’s a transliteration from the Greek, which is, itself, a transliteration from the Hebrew “Pesach”: Passover.

Today is the Christian Passover. Not literally co-terminal, of course, not a celebration of the Passover story built around Pharaohs, and door-posts, and the parting of waves.

But at it’s heart, this day is profoundly connected with that celebration of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

When Jesus’ resurrection came to be celebrated on a set day – Passover – there was originally only one service: the Great Vigil of the Resurrection. It was and remains the first service of the Church and the beginning of the Christian year. At every Easter Vigil (and last night was no exception) the first part of the service is a recounting of salvation history that includes the story of the Passover, the first Pascha. But it includes that story second to the beginning story – the story of creation – the story that speaks of universal goodness.

Both of those stories – of creation and of Pascha/Passover – were written down late in Israelite history – the last to be written down, in fact, not the first.

Why last? Because for the Old Testament writers human history offered few examples of that perfect relationship and Godly identity they believed lay at the heart of existence. As Desmond Tutu has said, “their knowledge [of human history] reached back across a landscape sodden with the blood of war and the torment of slavery. So they looked back instead to a time before time.” (Made for Goodness, p 152). They looked back to a place of and a moment of peace, of connectedness with God when all creation lived in harmony. They looked back to a time that said “we are all made for goodness”.

The blood and the torment told them that something had gone wrong. The blood and the torment told them that humanity had fallen from that goodness. And so they looked, next, to the place where freedom from harsh death and bloody torment was enacted for them, both at a moment in time and, symbolically, forever: Pascha. Passover, The Moment when God freed them, when all that they had hoped for – and all that they were hoping for again – was true, and right, and good, and *there!*

And here! Tonight/today is our Passover, our Pascha! Today we reach back across a continuing human landscape sodden with the blood of war that is so much more than the stench of military conflict; and of the torment of slavery that is so much more than the physical confinement and forced servitude, to a moment that, for us, is the Great Moment in human history: Jesus’ resurrection.

Yet for many of us, at this time in human history – and, perhaps, in our own lives – it’s difficult

to make that connection, to feel that it's real, and tangible, and right, and now! We are living in times when it feels like we are in that tomb, and the stone has NOT been rolled away!

Certainly that's how it felt for those close followers of Jesus – the 11 remaining co-wanderers, Martha and Mary and Lazarus; Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramathea, and the nameless others “who had believed that he was the one to save us”.

Starting with Mary Magdalene, they all – all – have experiences of Jesus unlike any that they had ever had before – experiences that, counter the cultural expectations of a resurrected body as zombie-like and threatening, transformed them from frightened and fearful individuals to a bold, celebrating, ecstatic community.

The words – the only words – that they could together settle on to describe that experience were these: Jesus has risen! Jesus has risen from the grave! Jesus has risen from death! Jesus has risen!

And Jesus continues to rise.

Every time a compassionate hand reaches out to lift up the downtrodden – the single mother struggling to make ends meet, the homeless vet suffering from PTSD, the distraught spouse who has lost a partner to divorce or death, the family foreclosed on by a bank computer – in that compassionate hand Jesus rises from the grave; and so do we.

Every time a forgiving heart reaches out with words of reconciliation – the long-separated family members dying for embrace; the old friends who've forgotten why they won't talk to each other; the angry factions who just won't listen to what their opponents are saying – in that forgiving heart Jesus rises from the grave; and so do we.

Every time a group of individuals comes together – old and young, rich and poor, conservative and progressive, male and female, gay and straight and transgendered, black and white and yellow, and red – and proclaims to each other AND to the world, that we are no longer individuals but a community of common purpose and commitment – in that gathering Jesus rises from the grave; and so do we.

The stone is always in the process of being moved. But which way do we see it moving? Is it to free or to entomb us?

That depends on our perspective, and not on the direction of the stone! With God, the stone is always being moved away so that light and life can shine in. With God, in every moment, in some way, the potential for transformation, the possibility of celebration, the promise of resurrection is present and available, offered to us in Jesus.

It is, for us, rather, to decide if we are willing to come out into the light of God's promise, to embrace and celebrate the new life of which Jesus' resurrection is only the first fruits..

It is for us to decide. May we be willing to embrace that new life and light that resurrection is our

gift to our world as much as it is Jesus' gift to us.

Amen