

The Day of Resurrection, March 27, 2016. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA
Nigel Taber-Hamilton Luke 24: 1-12

“Next time we see him, we might have to kill him!” That’s the voice of tyranny. It could have been said by a Roman Centurion during Passover week; it could have been Pilate. It wasn’t, it was March 9 in Fayetteville North Carolina. Then, like now, we live in challenging times. The story of Jesus’ resurrection is set within just such challenging times

Which leads us into the Gospel of Luke’s description of the Empty Tomb. And what a strange story it is! Even those who Luke describes – well, most of them, anyway, thought so! The women – rightly for the time – were frightened....after all, if you said someone had risen from the grave the contemporary response would have been to say, with horror, “My God! How did you get him back in it?!” Peter was so unimpressed that he just “went home.” And others thought the story unbelievable..... “an idle tale” – you could say “fairy tale” if you want – a “tall tale beyond belief.”

And that doesn’t work for Christians – **Easter is not about fluffy bunnies and painted eggs.** As our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, said last week, **“This world does not need another fairy tale; this week's story of crucifixion and resurrection is not a fairy tale.”**

Something’s missing from today’s gospel: it only has an empty tomb. If that’s where the story ends then we would indeed be searching for the living among the dead. But it’s more than an empty tomb, isn’t it?! **There’s a body involved!** But what sort of body is it?

For more than 200 years a conversation has been going on between those who view the resurrection literally – a physical, bodily resurrection – and those who are more inclined toward engaging that experience in terms of metaphor. While it might sound like these two perspectives are formed on either side of a great, unbridgeable philosophical divide, there are some remarkable overlaps. I recently listened to two towering figures in biblical studies and theology from either side of this divide – Bishop N.T. Wright and Dr. John Dominic Crossan. They were engaged in a conversation rather than a debate about Jesus’ resurrection. It was fascinating!

- **First, they mostly agreed on what Jesus’ post-resurrection body wasn’t**, including it wasn’t a resuscitated corpse, a ghost or a disembodied spirit, or a restored human being. And they both agreed that it’s appropriate to use the word “bodily” in connection with the word “resurrection.” That’s a big deal in those circles!
- Then there were the positive **agreements**: that **the tomb WAS empty**, and that the gospels’ descriptions of encounters with the post-resurrection Jesus were **genuine descriptions of actual encounters**, actual appearances.

There were places where they disagreed, but what I found significant is that both of them said this: **we’ve gone about as far as we’re going to be able to go** in unpacking what Jesus’ resurrection was and wasn’t; we’ve found those places where we agree, and where we disagree; after 200 years of what’s called modern biblical exegesis, perspectives are set, minds are unlikely to be changed.

What’s more important, they said, is to ask a different sort of question: what does Jesus’ resurrection mean to us, today?

In today’s Epistle, Paul talked about Jesus’ resurrection being the **“first fruits,”** and that the general resurrection – including ours – was going to be at some undetermined time in the future.

You could say that Jesus' resurrection and ours form book-ends; nowhere in the New Testament does it say "Jesus is raised, so now we're all off to heaven!" What it says is that in Jesus' resurrection the Kingdom of God has begun, God's new creation has begun – and in the interim – the books between the book-ends – **we have work to do**, we need to take up our part, our role, in the unfolding transformational process of God's Kingdom.

The cosmic transformation that God's kingdom represents is a transformation "from a world of evil, and injustice, and impurity, and violence, into a world of justice, and peace and purity, and wholeness." (Wright). Jesus' resurrection is God's exclamation point that says loudly, joyfully, boldly that the Kingdom of God has begun, that "behold, **I am** doing a new thing, (cf. Isaiah 43:19). The Divine Clean-up has begun, and there are consequences for anyone who sides with God.

Siding with God! That sounds more like a political campaign slogan to me! And I suppose it is. To see how it is you have to put yourself in the world of Jesus and of Paul – the 1st Century of the Common Era. Here are some titles: "Lord," "Savior," "Son of God" – who were they first assigned to? Caesar! Before they were ever applied to Jesus they were applied to Caesar. In applying imperial titles to Jesus, the early Christians were challenging everyone willing to listen, "are you for Caesar and the Empire, or Jesus and the Kingdom of God?" The challenge has not changed in 2000 years. How are we to respond to that question and the ones that come from it? Like:

- How does Jesus' resurrection **change** me and us?
- How does Jesus' resurrection **change** the world?
- How do **we** participate in the new creation that is the kingdom of God?

Those questions make it clear that **Christian faith is a politically revolutionary act, just as Jesus' resurrection is a politically revolutionary doctrine** – the tyrant's last weapon is death; "Next time we see him, we might have to kill him!" But if someone is raising the dead then the world is being turned upside-down.

Jesus' resurrection inaugurates the renewal of the cosmos, the transformation of the cosmos, the Great Clean-up that involves us as participants and not as bystanders. The post-resurrection Jesus is an "incorporative messiah" – he sums up his people in himself; what happens to him happens to his people – what happens to him happens to us, if we are willing to make our claim of allegiance.

This "us-inclusion" isn't how we in the West, in the Latin Churches, have traditionally understood resurrection: we've seen it as "only about Jesus" or "only about Jesus and me" or "only about me." The problem with this is that if resurrection is only personal, only about us as individuals, then our Christian "job" would be to remain quiet, to pray and to wait – the Christian hope would be something akin to fire insurance; we wouldn't see ourselves as being appropriately called into cosmic engagement.

The Orthodox tradition has from a very early time understood resurrection not as personal, not as solitary but as communal. There's a tradition-stream in Orthodox iconography that, when it matured, depicted and depicts Jesus' resurrection as connected with Adam and Eve as the

symbols of humanity. Jesus is shown reaching down into hell and – with his right hand holding Adam’s hand, and with his left holding Eve’s – bodily pulling them up out of the grave.

We participate in Jesus’ resurrection; but we do so only if we participate in bringing about the Kingdom in the here-and-now. This means that what we do in the present by way of justice and mercy and grace and forgiveness and healing and liberation is a part of the kingdom that God is making. In doing this we’re collaborating in the continuing meaning of Jesus’ resurrection; in doing this we’re working out God’s intention that we participate not only in the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection, but in working to bring that kingdom which his death inaugurates into being in its fullness.

What our Presiding Bishop, and Bishop Wright, and Dr. Crossan are all saying is this: Jesus’ resurrection challenges the political and social pretensions of our world, and so a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus that’s divorced from a commitment to work to bring in the kingdom of Justice and peace, joy and love, right here, right now, is an empty celebration. Your renewal of your baptismal vows is a political act which says “I’m on board with God’s agenda.”

I would say this: don’t expect the Empires of our world to thank you! “Next time we see them, we might have to kill them!” When Roman Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Dom Helder Camera, was asked about why it was that he was viewed so differently by different parts of Brazilian society he said this: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”

As Crossan has observed, the birth of the kingdom of God, the beginning of the Great Divine Clean-up, poses for every believer a question: “how are we going to take back the world from the thugs?”

On this day there’s a second question, intimately tied to that one, a communal question: “Are we on-board with God’s agenda to bring about the transformation of our world?” If you are on-board with God’s agenda then what are you going to do about it?

The Day of Resurrection, March 27, 2016. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA
Nigel Taber-Hamilton Luke 24: 1-12

“Next time we see him, we might have to kill him!” That’s the voice of tyranny. It could have been said by a Roman Centurion during Passover week; it could have been Pilate. It wasn’t, it was March 9 in Fayetteville North Carolina. Then, like now, we live in challenging times. The story of Jesus’ resurrection is set within just such challenging times

Which leads us into the Gospel of Luke’s description of the Empty Tomb. And what a strange story it is! Even those who Luke describes – well, most of them, anyway, thought so! The women – rightly for the time – were frightened....after all, if you said someone had risen from the grave the contemporary response would have been to say, with horror, “My God! How did you get him back in it?!” Peter was so unimpressed that he just “went home.” And others thought the story unbelievable..... “an idle tale” – you could say “fairy tale” if you want – a “tall tale beyond belief.”

And that doesn’t work for Christians – **Easter is not about fluffy bunnies and painted eggs.** As our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, said last week, **“This world does not need another fairy tale; this week's story of crucifixion and resurrection is not a fairy tale.”**

Something’s missing from today’s gospel: it only has an empty tomb. If that’s where the story ends then we would indeed be searching for the living among the dead. But it’s more than an empty tomb, isn’t it?! **There’s a body involved!** But what sort of body is it?

For more than 200 years a conversation has been going on between those who view the resurrection literally – a physical, bodily resurrection – and those who are more inclined toward engaging that experience in terms of metaphor. While it might sound like these two perspectives are formed on either side of a great, unbridgeable philosophical divide, there are some remarkable overlaps. I recently listened to two towering figures in biblical studies and theology from either side of this divide – Bishop N.T. Wright and Dr. John Dominic Crossan. They were engaged in a conversation rather than a debate about Jesus’ resurrection. It was fascinating!

- **First, they mostly agreed on what Jesus’ post-resurrection body wasn’t**, including it wasn’t a resuscitated corpse, a ghost or a disembodied spirit, or a restored human being. And they both agreed that it’s appropriate to use the word “bodily” in connection with the word “resurrection.” That’s a big deal in those circles!
- Then there were the positive **agreements**: that **the tomb WAS empty**, and that the gospels’ descriptions of encounters with the post-resurrection Jesus were **genuine descriptions of actual encounters**, actual appearances.

There were places where they disagreed, but what I found significant is that both of them said this: **we’ve gone about as far as we’re going to be able to go** in unpacking what Jesus’ resurrection was and wasn’t; we’ve found those places where we agree, and where we disagree; after 200 years of what’s called modern biblical exegesis, perspectives are set, minds are unlikely to be changed.

What’s more important, they said, is to ask a different sort of question: what does Jesus’ resurrection mean to us, today?

In today’s Epistle, Paul talked about Jesus’ resurrection being the **“first fruits,”** and that the general resurrection – including ours – was going to be at some undetermined time in the future.

You could say that Jesus' resurrection and ours form book-ends; nowhere in the New Testament does it say "Jesus is raised, so now we're all off to heaven!" What it says is that in Jesus' resurrection the Kingdom of God has begun, God's new creation has begun – and in the interim – the books between the book-ends – **we have work to do**, we need to take up our part, our role, in the unfolding transformational process of God's Kingdom.

The cosmic transformation that God's kingdom represents is a transformation "from a world of evil, and injustice, and impurity, and violence, into a world of justice, and peace and purity, and wholeness." (Wright). Jesus' resurrection is God's exclamation point that says loudly, joyfully, boldly that the Kingdom of God has begun, that "behold, I **am** doing a new thing, (cf. Isaiah 43:19). The Divine Clean-up has begun, and there are consequences for anyone who sides with God.

Siding with God! That sounds more like a political campaign slogan to me! And I suppose it is. To see how it is you have to put yourself in the world of Jesus and of Paul – the 1st Century of the Common Era. Here are some titles: "Lord," "Savior," "Son of God" – who were they first assigned to? Caesar! Before they were ever applied to Jesus they were applied to Caesar. In applying imperial titles to Jesus, the early Christians were challenging everyone willing to listen, "are you for Caesar and the Empire, or Jesus and the Kingdom of God?" The challenge has not changed in 2000 years. How are we to respond to that question and the ones that come from it? Like:

- How does Jesus' resurrection **change** me and us?
- How does Jesus' resurrection **change** the world?
- How do **we** participate in the new creation that is the kingdom of God?

Those questions make it clear that **Christian faith is a politically revolutionary act, just as Jesus' resurrection is a politically revolutionary doctrine** – the tyrant's last weapon is death; "Next time we see him, we might have to kill him!" But if someone is raising the dead then the world is being turned upside-down.

Jesus' resurrection inaugurates the renewal of the cosmos, the transformation of the cosmos, the Great Clean-up that involves us as participants and not as bystanders. The post-resurrection Jesus is an "incorporative messiah" – he sums up his people in himself; what happens to him happens to his people – what happens to him happens to us, if we are willing to make our claim of allegiance.

This "us-inclusion" isn't how we in the West, in the Latin Churches, have traditionally understood resurrection: we've seen it as "only about Jesus" or "only about Jesus and me" or "only about me." The problem with this is that if resurrection is only personal, only about us as individuals, then our Christian "job" would be to remain quiet, to pray and to wait – the Christian hope would be something akin to fire insurance; we wouldn't see ourselves as being appropriately called into cosmic engagement.

The Orthodox tradition has from a very early time understood resurrection not as personal, not as solitary but as communal. There's a tradition-stream in Orthodox iconography that, when it matured, depicted and depicts Jesus' resurrection as connected with Adam and Eve as the

symbols of humanity. Jesus is shown reaching down into hell and – with his right hand holding Adam’s hand, and with his left holding Eve’s – bodily pulling them up out of the grave.

We participate in Jesus’ resurrection; but we do so only if we participate in bringing about the Kingdom in the here-and-now. This means that what we do in the present by way of justice and mercy and grace and forgiveness and healing and liberation is a part of the kingdom that God is making. In doing this we’re collaborating in the continuing meaning of Jesus’ resurrection; in doing this we’re working out God’s intention that we participate not only in the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection, but in working to bring that kingdom which his death inaugurates into being in its fullness.

What our Presiding Bishop, and Bishop Wright, and Dr. Crossan are all saying is this: Jesus’ resurrection challenges the political and social pretensions of our world, and so a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus that’s divorced from a commitment to work to bring in the kingdom of Justice and peace, joy and love, right here, right now, is an empty celebration. Your renewal of your baptismal vows is a political act which says “I’m on board with God’s agenda.”

I would say this: don’t expect the Empires of our world to thank you! “Next time we see them, we might have to kill them!” When Roman Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Dom Helder Camera, was asked about why it was that he was viewed so differently by different parts of Brazilian society he said this: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”

As Crossan has observed, the birth of the kingdom of God, the beginning of the Great Divine Clean-up, poses for every believer a question: “how are we going to take back the world from the thugs?”

On this day there’s a second question, intimately tied to that one, a communal question: “Are we on-board with God’s agenda to bring about the transformation of our world?” If you are on-board with God’s agenda then what are you going to do about it?

