

“Be The Resurrection”

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Common Street Spiritual Center

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Mark 15:25-16:8

I'd like to begin with a meditation on hope from the *Mahabharata*, an ancient Hindu epic.

“Hope is the sheet anchor of every person; [hope steadies our ships in the emergencies brought on by the storms of life.] When hope is destroyed, great grief follows which, perhaps, is almost equal to death itself....”

Hope is bigger than a mountain with all its trees. Hope is bigger than the sky itself. O Eternal One, Hope is really immeasurable. It is highly difficult of being understood and equally difficult of being conquered. Seeing this last attribute of Hope, I ask, what else is so unconquerable as this?”

Jesus gathered his followers, both women and men, to go up with him to Jerusalem to bring the Gospel of Peace to the thousands gathered for Passover; the scriptures say Jesus knew it would be his last pilgrimage to the holy city. He knew he would be rejected, betrayed, and put to death.

But this is what most of his followers were hoping for:

Jesus, already well known throughout Israel for his compassion, wisdom, healing, social vision, and many signs of connection with God...would enter Jerusalem with his followers, and, they hoped, he would go into the temple, and as he began to teach and heal he would be recognized as Messiah...the people of Israel would, they hoped, then come together through Jesus' visionary leadership, and somehow, with the help of God, they would defeat their Roman oppressors. They would then establish a just and compassionate society whose values and practices, they hoped, would quickly spread around the world, bringing universal peace, enlightenment, and wellbeing. They were hoping for nothing less than heaven on earth.

What happened instead was that their Messianic hopes were devastated. Jesus was met, in Jerusalem, with misunderstanding, opposition, betrayal, a false trial, and then his execution. His disciples were at first terrified, they were at first completely immobilized by depression. Their hope died.

But those who killed Jesus were soon just as disappointed as his followers:

They expected that the death of Jesus would mean the death of the Gospel movement of which Jesus had become the central leader. They expected that the revolutionary band Jesus had brought to Jerusalem, fueled by little more than daily bread and a Messianic dream, would soon go home. They would, they expected, leave the religious authorities and the Temple alone, and they would, they expected, resign themselves to the status quo, and stop agitating against the injustices of Roman rule.

Instead, the unexpected resurrection happened... After being immobilized by fear and terror, the followers of Jesus, still in Jerusalem, experienced a rebirth of hope and courage. They felt the spirit of their beloved teacher Jesus coming alive in them again. They found ways to make sense of his tragic death and continue preaching the Gospel in hope. They did not go home. They stayed in Jerusalem until the Romans destroyed the entire city in 70AD; they went to the temple every day and took up a kind of semi-permanent residency in the courtyard outside the Temple called Solomon's Portico. This was like an ancient Occupy Wall St.

For me the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead beautifully expresses the renewed courage and hope of his followers.

The Spiritual Center recently formed a new "development committee"—with Kali Karakasidou, Fotios Mpouris, Pamela Powers, Leslie Githens, and myself. In our first few meetings we have asked ourselves how we might reach out to more local people who resonate with our community's essential mission and vision.

At our last meeting Pamela Powers suggested we adopt the tag line, "Be the Change", which comes from a larger quotation attributed to Gandhi: "Be the change you want to see in the world." We all agreed it is perfect!

Our mission and vision affirms that “We are a community that envisions a life-sustaining society and cultivates activities that bring peace, justice, and healing to the earth.” Let me name some of the ways we are already doing this...Rainbow Peace Flag Project, Racial Justice Dialogues, Interfaith Programs, Renewable Natick, Weekly Peace Vigils on the Corner of 27 and 135, the Work That Reconnects, and so much more...

Building on this theme of “Be the Change”, and all it means to our community of lovers, seekers, and spiritual activists, I want to invite all of us here today, in the spirit of Easter, to “Be the Resurrection.”

In our community let us continue to lay hold of the sacred responsibility to repair the world, what the sages of Judaism called “Tikkun Olam”.

And so I invite each one of us, individually and as a community, to **Be the Resurrection with your imaginations, hearts, voices, and hands...**

Resurrection can be deeply personal: a recovery from disease or addiction, reintegration after a bout of mental illness, mourning and then healing after a major loss. After setbacks and failures, a personal resurrection might look like a return to a sense of purpose. It might look like getting back up and trying again. Resurrection literally means, “get up” or “stand up.” I know that many of us have experienced such a resurrection.

But to live the resurrection of Jesus we are called to go beyond what is conventionally personal in our society...as the Rabbi Hillel said, “If I am not for myself who will be? But if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?” When our hearts and minds are resurrected in the consciousness of love that Christ shared with the whole world, we come to realize that we are our neighbors; we are our enemies; the whole world is our body. We are essentially parts of one another and the Earth. To be the resurrection is to bring new life to all beings on this planet Earth.

The suffering of Christ is sadly not extraordinary in our world—millions of people are groaning under local and global systems of domination—systems fueled by greed, racism, militarism, sexism, and all the many forms of hatred and domination that beset our world. Justice movement leaders like Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, and Berta Caceres, to name a few, are still being assassinated like Jesus was. In the times we live in, nearly our whole planet is being exploited. Species of plants and animals are rapidly going extinct; our oceans are becoming toxic and increasingly lifeless. We are now entering an era of climate change that might disrupt our present hopes for a more just and peaceful world.

And so the story of the resurrection of Jesus stands as a model for the new/old stories of hope that we can tell today, stories about people around the globe, of all nations and religions, turning away from ego-driven greed and destruction, and recognizing the truth of our interconnection with one another and all life; people waking up to the possibility of peace and demilitarizing the nations; people repenting of greed and rehumanizing our economy; people using spirituality, ritual, and art to revive our awareness of the sacredness of all that is; and people making practical changes each day for the sake of the flourishing of life. As Joanna Macy writes, "'Out of this darkness a new world can arise, not to be constructed by our minds so much as to emerge from our dreams. Even though we cannot see clearly how it's going to turn out, we are still called to let the future into our imagination. We will never be able to build what we have not first cherished in our hearts.'"

So let the resurrection begin with you, with the resurrection of your hearts and minds. In a spirit of waking up and rising from the dead, let us dare to dream the compassionate society that the earth is crying out for. As we resurrect into our full humanity we will sing new songs, establish new societal values and create new cultural life-ways. And so we will become the fully cosmic beings that we naturally are. **Hope is bigger than a mountain with all its trees. Hope is bigger than the sky itself. O Eternal One, Hope is really immeasurable. It is highly difficult of being understood and equally difficult of being conquered. Seeing this last attribute of Hope, I ask, what else is so unconquerable as this?**

Benediction:

Once again: Be the resurrection. Go into the dark places, boldly face suffering, stagger, fall, and then get back up.

Keep courage alive. Keep the dream of the heart alive. Keep telling and retelling the stories that bring hope back to life.