

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 22:1-14

Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalms 23

Philippians 4:1-9

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The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Resurrection moments.

It seems like such a nice thing to think about. Resurrection is that thing we long for, the promise, the miracle, the materializing of our hopes and prayers. So when I say the phrase, “resurrection moment”, chances are you think of good things. You might even feel a smile coming on your face, a warm feeling in your heart.

In the Bible, we think of resurrection moments being the times God was really real, working in and among us to bring back to life something that was lost. It’s God answering prayers. God loving us. God believing in us. And so we point and say, “Now, that’s something I can believe in!”

Funny thing is, resurrection can only occur out of places of despair or loss. It doesn’t come about when things are simply good or easy or going our way. Usually, when we think of resurrection moments, we can tie them back to a time when we needed some hope, something good out of whatever bad thing we were facing. Times when we needed healing and transformation. When we needed to repair the despair that had broken us a part.

I couldn’t help but think of resurrection the other day when I was in the garden. It’s the end of the season and I am at the point of the gardening journey when I am done. I’m tired. The weeds have come back...in abundance. The plants are unruly and bending over under their own weight. The flowers are fading. And, so, I have started to clean out the beds for winter. One by one I have started to pull up the dead plants and expose the bare soil once again.

It was hard at first, tearing up the work that I had spent hours cultivating. I reflected back to the spring and how much promise and excitement I had felt. I remembered the sweetness of the tomatoes and the spice of the peppers. I remembered the buds of zinnias and cosmos and sunflowers popping open color upon color. I remember the bees buzzing in the buckwheat we had planted just for them. It was glorious seeing it all grow.

And, then I looked down at one of the beds. It was littered with rotten little tomatoes. One after another they speckled the soil with red, orange, and yellow squished skins still holding on to their seeds as if to say, I had a plan! I had a plan to grow into something special, to flavor the perfect salad, to sit on a window sill ripening in the sun! But things just didn’t work out the way I had thought. And so, here I am. A rotting little heap of fruit.

I felt a sadness come over me. A sadness of what could have been, what I had missed, how I could have done more and given these tomatoes the purpose I had intended for them.

But, as I looked out over those rotting tomatoes and as I looked up at the dried sunflower stalks that surrounded me, I realized that this was no ending. In my heart I knew better than that. Those seeds that lay in the soil held promise. Those dried sunflowers were still working their magic. Each held resurrection. I just couldn't see it yet.

Here's what I know about resurrection...Winter will come. Rain will fall. Everything will look and feel forgotten for a time. But, the seeds will remember. They will remember how to call forth life out of darkness. They will feel the call of resurrection when warmth surrounds them once again next year. They will feel the call of resurrection when spring rain seeps into the soil and nourishes them back to life. And so, I am reminded to remember as well.

It seems it is so easy to forget that in the midst of the brokenness we are feeling in the world right now, in the midst of division and anger, in the midst of sickness and loss...it's easy to forget that God is still here...nourishing all of us back to life.

We consider this space where we are right now liminal space. The space in between our hurt and our healing. The space where we let go of what we once were and claim who are to become. Because this we know for sure...life has been upended and we are desperate for resurrection.

It is then, right in the midst of that kind of uncertainty, that kind of upending, that I love to remember Paul's words in Philippians, *"The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

*"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* I can't even count how many times I have reminded myself of these words when all has felt broken and abandoned. They helped me remember the promise of resurrection.

When Isaiah speaks of God doing wonderful things, he's talking about a deep performative goodness that works within the world, that transforms and resurrects. When the prophet wrote the words from our reading, he was writing in a time of destruction, division, and distress. He acknowledged the despair around him and then he centered his concerns directly with God, trusting that nothing would be too damaged or too broken for God to heal. Isaiah calls out...this is the Lord for whom we have waited, for whom we have lived in this liminal space. It is a trust that is only born forth out of faith, a peace which surpasses all understanding. That's what resurrection moments are all about. That is what we hear from Isaiah and from Paul. They remind us to keep hope alive.

Dee relayed a story to me this week and I want to leave you with this beautiful image that she shared...

EB White (the author of *Charlotte's Web*) was watching his wife, Katharine, in their garden. She was planting daffodil bulbs in late November. But she was also battling cancer and didn't have much time left. In fact, she would probably never see the bulbs come to life in the spring. Looking back upon this moment, EB White reflected, "There she was, calmly plotting the resurrection."

Calmly plotting the resurrection. Cultivating hope in the liminal space of uncertainty. Believing that God's love for us transforms even the darkest of times.

Thanks be to God. Amen.