

Grace Episcopal Church
4th Sunday in Lent
Rev. Brian C Justice

Joshua 5.9-12
Psalm 32
2 Corinthians 5.16-21
Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

Everything is New

O God of Resurrection,
Open our eyes that we might see new life
always and everywhere.
Amen.

As we make the journey from the Ashes of Lent to the Alleluias of Easter, we are invited to see things in a different way.

St Paul describes this vision in the second letter to the church at Corinth. "... there is a new creation: everything old has passed away ... see ...everything has become new! All this is from God ..."

Everything is new.

Really?

Do we see the world like that? The dishes on the table, the dog in the yard and the bird at the window, the fields and trees and roads and houses, the people in the grocery store, the words of the prayers and the melodies of the songs ... are these things *new*? You and I ... are we new?

I wonder.

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The season of Lent is a season of discipline. The word discipline and the word disciple are related, of course. From the Latin, discipline means learning and disciple means learner. And, like Jesus who passed forty days of discipline in the wilderness, we pass forty days of discipline in Lent to learn how to be a disciple.

And to be a disciple of Jesus is to learn *a new way of seeing*. This is, after all, what happened to Paul. After persecuting the disciples of Jesus, he was on the road to Damascus when he was overcome by an encounter with the radiant reality of God. He was blinded in the light, lost his sight for three days, and so took refuge in a cave. When he emerged – his sight restored – he quite literally was able to see everything in a new way.

Paul acquired a new vision, a vision of everyone and everything reconciled and redeemed and renewed ... he *saw* everyone and everything in the light of God, in the newness of God. This means to say, he saw everyone and everything in the reality of Resurrection.

Paul learned. Paul became a disciple. And so he proclaimed, “there is a new creation: everything old has passed away ... see ... everything has become new! All this is from God...”

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While Lent seems to be a serious and somber season in the Liturgy – with ashes and without alleluias – it teaches us that the spiritual life is a life of learning (i.e., of discipline) and, thus, of practice. As disciples, we are invited to the spiritual practice of *seeing* the reality of Resurrection and ... more ... *living* the reality of Resurrection.

This is what Paul is expressing to the Corinthians. And today’s text from the Gospel of Luke reveals to us the full depth, the full scope of the meaning of Resurrection.

Jesus is criticized by religious authorities for breaking the rules, namely breaking bread with the “wrong” sort of people. This, by the way, is what Jesus and all of the great spiritual masters do: whenever they have to choose between the rules and love, they always choose love and break the rules! So when he is criticized, Jesus tells that famous parable, the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The younger of two sons comes to his father and demands his inheritance. His father, presumably knowing already what will happen, grants the son his gift. The younger son travels to the far country, squanders everything in “dissolute living”, and so takes work as a hired hand. Sad, hungry, broken, desperate, he resolves to return to his father, admit his mistakes, and accept the consequences. “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion” ... and ran down the road to greet him. He hugged him, he kissed him, and he called for a feast that very day.

But when the elder son heard of these events, he was filled with anger and resentment. His father came out to plead with him, but the elder son rebuked him, recalling his steadfast obedience and loyalty over the years. And “yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.”

And the father says, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours ... but *this brother of yours was dead and has come back to life ... we had to celebrate.*”

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Jesus has shown us the deep meaning of Resurrection.

“The Resurrection” is not merely a single, isolated event in the life of a man 2,000 years ago; Resurrection is the moment-by-moment reality of God. Resurrection is always happening.

See ... there is new life everywhere! As in the parable, where the father is filled with love for *both* of his sons and brings forth new life in them, God is love (1 John 4.16) and brings forth new life in everyone and everything. In this world of constant change, yes, there is suffering and there is brokenness and there is death, but God raises new life from everything.

God is love. God is life. God is Resurrection.

Jesus reveals and Paul writes that Resurrection cannot be understood *only* as the reanimation or resuscitation of dead or cremated “earthly flesh.” Rather, it is a theosis or deification of the whole person. Literally, a making-into-God of the whole person.

The Book of Common Prayer affirms that “resurrection of the body” may include – but cannot be reduced to – a physical or biological event. The Catechism (p. 862) says:

Q. What do we mean by the resurrection of the body?

A. We mean that God will raise us from death in the fullness of our being, that we may live with Christ in the communion of the saints.

Resurrection is an ontological renewal in the “fullness of our being” ... it is a making new of our whole being in God.

As disciples, we can *see* the miracle right before our very eyes because *there it is!*

Love brings people back to life when they are dead to life. Love can bring a child back to the classroom after a failure or a rejection. Love can bring a widow back to the world after the death of a spouse. Love can bring a soldier back to security and trust after the trauma of combat. Love can bring people of different backgrounds and beliefs together after division and conflict.

Love makes new what was old, makes whole what was broken, makes alive what was dead.

This is Resurrection. And, with God, it is happening in all times and in all places.

We are disciples. We are learning *to see* Resurrection everywhere. We are learning *to live* Resurrection everywhere. We are a Resurrection people.

Like the loving Father with his two sons: “*This brother of yours was dead and has come back to life.*” ... It’s time to celebrate.

Amen.