

TEXT: Lectionary Readings for Easter
THEME: We are Jesus' brothers and sisters
SUBJECT: Easter
TITLE: Easter Is About Pronouns

Easter Sunday
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Messiah Moravian
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The latest Harris poll indicates that 98% of Christians believe Easter, resurrection, is about the future Christian hope - life after death. Anglican Bishop and conservative New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright, author of a shelf full of books on the New Testament, declares one of the strange features of the resurrection accounts is that they never mention the future Christian hope.

Despite a thousand Easter hymns and a million Easter sermons, Wright continues, the resurrection narratives in the Gospels never, ever say anything like, "Jesus is raised, therefore there is a life after death," let alone, "Jesus is raised, therefore we shall go to heaven when we die." Not even, in a more authentic first-century Christian way, do they say, "Jesus is raised, therefore we shall be raised from the dead after the sleep of death."

No! Insofar as the event is interpreted, Easter has a very this-worldly, present age meaning: Jesus is raised, so God's new creation has begun and those who follow Jesus have a job to do! To be sure, as early as Paul the resurrection of Jesus is firmly linked to the final resurrection of all God's people. But this is not the point of the resurrection stories in the Gospels.

Paul's linkage of the final resurrection of all God's people with the resurrection of Jesus is grounded in belief in a trustworthy God. As Rowan Williams notes, "The God who is totally committed to what God made and loved and worked with, whose action and purpose are all directed towards our flourishing and healing, fits with a vision of a God who will not let us go even on the far side of death."

The Gospel stories of resurrection, however, are not about the future Christian hope; they are about pronouns. Hard to get anymore "this-worldly" than pronouns. The first Easter sermon, according to John, was one sentence long (we have already blown past that limit). The great silence of death was broken with the speaking of these words: "I am going to *my* Father and *your* Father, to *my* God and *your* God."

Easter is the fulfillment of everything Jesus lived and taught. The message of Easter is not one of distinction, of how exalted Jesus is and how commonplace we are, nor is the message of Easter one of difference, of how divine Jesus is and how human we are. The message of Easter is one of Jesus' identification with us; he is *our* brother. His Father is our Father, his God is our God. Resurrection life is life in union with Jesus and with God.

We should hear Jesus' declaration, "My Father and your Father, My God and your God," in the tradition of Ruth's declaration to her mother-in-law, "Wherever you go, I will go, wherever you

lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, your God my God.” Resurrection life is life together.

Peter’s Easter sermon begins, “In truth, I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons; rather, in *every* people, *whoever* reveres him and performs works of righteousness is accepted by him.” It took Peter a while to come to this realization, to understand the meaning of Easter, but he got there.

The inclusiveness of the Easter message is affirmed in Colossians. The NRSV translates Col 3:4 “When Christ *who* is *your* life is revealed . . .” Hart’s translation reads, “When the Anointed, *our* life, is made manifest . . .” Christ is *your* life but not in opposition to being your neighbor’s life. Christ is *our* life. Life in Christ is life together.

At the risk of repeating myself, let me say again (see “What Is a Person?” sermon on 16 February 2020), we are not persons alone, in isolation. We are only persons in relationship. We have life as persons, as human beings, only in communion with one another, only in community.

A wise old soul observed, “I don’t understand why some people want to go to heaven, a communion of peoples from all nations, of every race, speaking foreign languages, when they can’t stand to be with these people in this life on earth.”

Peter had to learn to be with Gentiles, Roman soldiers no less. The Christ who is *our* life is the Christ of all peoples: Asian, European, African, North American, Central American, South American, Middle Eastern; Mexican, Chinese, Arab, Persian, Greek, Italian, Irish, Russian, Canadian . . . It appears we find it easier to believe in life after death than to believe all these peoples are *our* brothers and *our* sisters.

Wendell Berry writes:

The little stream sings
in the crease of the hill.
It is the water of life. It knows
nothing of death, nothing.
And this is the morning
of Christ’s resurrection.
The tomb is empty. There is
no death. Death is our illusion,
our wish to belong only
to ourselves, which is our freedom
to kill one another.
From this sleep may we too
rise, as out of the dark grave.

Death is our wish to belong only to ourselves. This wish is a dark grave. I wonder if Easter faith is so challenging because we find resurrection life, life together, life shared with all God's people, more threatening than death?

Easter revolutionizes our social, political, economic and religious ways of ordering life *in this world*. Male privilege (Mary is the first apostle), white supremacy, economic injustice, most favored nation status, are tombs in which we bury the promise of Easter. We weep, not because someone has stolen the body of Jesus, we weep because the risen Jesus has stolen our cherished way of life.

In John's telling of the story, Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. I take great comfort in Jesus as the gardener, the cultivator of life. Easter is the story of the gradual opening of Mary's eyes to see more clearly who Jesus is: from not recognizing him, to mistaking him for the gardener, to seeing him as the teacher, to knowing him as her brother.

Mary is entrusted with the message of Easter, the meaning of the event. Go and tell the boys huddled together behind locked doors in fear for their lives, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Easter is Jesus declaration that we are his brothers and sisters, children of the same God. Easter means we cannot claim Jesus as our brother while denying Asians or Africans or Mexicans are our brothers and sisters. The miracle of Easter is the miracle of the transformation of "I" into "We," "mine" into "ours," "us vs them" into "life together."

PRAYER: by Thomas Merton

O God, we are one with you. You have made us one with You.
You have taught us that, if we are open to one another, You dwell in us.
Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts.
Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection.

O God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely,
we accept You, and we love you with our being, because our being is in
Your Being, our spirit is rooted in Your Spirit.
Fill us then with love and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in
this one Spirit which makes you present to the world.

BENEDICTION

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our brother Jesus,
Strengthen you to walk with him in resurrection life.