

## Resuscitation, Reincarnation, Resurrection

I learned the other day that some of our young people greet each other on Easter with this catchy phrase: "happy zombie day!"

As the numbers of those who are unaffiliated with any faith tradition have risen from about 10% 20 years ago to 30% today, as the pandemic has kept so many of us apart for a very long time, as the notions of where we are heading in this life and what happens after we die are too often submerged into the day to day effort to keep food on the table, gas in the tank and some rest for our eyes after a hard day at work, it seems like a good time, this second Sunday after Easter, to speak about our destiny.

How many people these days think that when we die, we simply return to the earth?

That this life is all there is?

That there is nothing waiting beyond?

And when we do think of a possible life beyond, how do we envision it?

I was shocked to read that among the most popular movies of all time are in fact the zombie movies!

I was shocked because, at least to me, they seem to be so silly.

Dragging stiff legs and stiff arms up out of graves and attacking living human beings for no apparent reason other than to cause terror, nearly all of these movies have the same plot line and the same ending.

It's hard to believe that anyone actually sees our destiny as zombies, notwithstanding the "happy zombie day" greeting I received on Easter Sunday.

Far more embedded in our various cultures is the idea of reincarnation.

Buddhism and Hinduism both have aspects of this in their faith traditions.

The idea being that we are continually reborn into this world, with the hope of engaging ever more deeply in the true meaning of life.

That each new birth leads us closer to a place of unification with the Source of all that is.

So one might be reincarnated as an insect or as an animal or as a holy person.

The idea being that we need multiple lifetimes, multiple chances, to come to a place of wisdom, peace and joy.

All of which makes the Christian idea of resurrection at once the most radical and the most difficult to wrap our minds around.

It's one thing to think about people dying and then coming back in a different form.

It's entirely different to think of someone dying and then rising into a transformed spiritual, yet recognizable body, that they inhabited on this earth – in their one and only life.

A life so unique that the transformed body carries with it the ups and downs, the good and bad, the scars and the joys, experienced during that unique life.

All transformed to be sure.

But all remaining as well.

When we consider resurrection, we can certainly understand the reaction of Thomas when told of the news about Jesus appearing.

While the apostles lived 2000 years ago, they knew as well as we know, that dead people stay dead.

They too understood the idea of an immortal soul that might go on to God or go up to heaven.

They too heard stories of ghosts and apparitions.

But they certainly had no expectation of that which encountered them in the risen Jesus.

Indeed, they can only share with us those glimpses and feelings of wonderment at what they experienced, while remaining completely flummoxed by the whole affair.

So why resurrection?

Perhaps because resurrection, with all of its difficulties and ambiguities, says something about the sanctity of human suffering, and the holiness of every individual life.

Particularly for those who have been at the bottom of the scale of our human society.

To them, resurrection says that the lives of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the least, the lost, the left behind, are not only worthy, but unspeakably precious in God's sight.

So precious that they are never lost.

As Esau McCaulley wrote in last week's New York Times:

"I wish I had never seen the videos of Anjanette Young or Ahmad Arbury, but I have.

I could long for a world in which African Americans do not die at a higher rate from COVID-19, but that world does not yet exist.

For many black bodies, the last few years have felt like an extended Good Friday.

Bodily suffering has been a constant feature of the African-American experience.

We know well the persistent disregard of our bodies from the auction block to the lynching tree to the knee upon the neck of George Floyd.

Part of my birthright as a black child of the south was grainy footage of Emmett Till's family fainting at the sight of his disfigured body.

His mother wanted an open coffin to show the world what anti-black racism had done to her child.

She hoped that seeing such malice would bring repentance.

But we humans are frighteningly capable of ignoring the harm we do to one another.

We refuse to see." NYT, 4/17/20.

Mr. McCaully goes on to ask:

"What God will do about the disinherited and ripped apart bodies of the world?' is a central question of religion.

So give me a bodily resurrection — or ask God to step aside.

The depiction of the afterlife in which we live apart from our bodies gives physical suffering the final word.

If a black body can be hanged from a tree and burned, never to be restored again, what kind of victory is the survival of a soul?

The mob, then, is able to take something that even God cannot restore." Id., modified.

Resurrection is the culmination of God's promise to make ALL THINGS new.

Resurrection is the ultimate fulfillment of God being alive in all things, just as all things are alive in God.

Death animates the zombie.

Which is why zombies have no compassion, no mercy, indeed, no personality at all.

Reincarnation, on the other hand, is animated by the breath of this world.

Continual rebirths, continual first breaths, that will inevitably, one day, breathe its' last.

But resurrection is animated by the Spirit of God.

It's why the "Spiritual Body" that Jesus becomes is at once more ethereal and yet more real than your body or mine.

Every human person has a spark of the divine.

But in the resurrection, it seems that that spark becomes a roaring flame!

Resurrection is the fulfillment of God's promise "that all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."  
Julian of Norwich.

"Resurrection makes us part of something rare, something precious, something utterly revolutionary.

It feels like an uprising.

An uprising of hope, not hate.

An uprising armed with love, not weapons.

An uprising that shouts a joyful promise of life and peace, not angry threats of hostility and death.

It's an uprising of outstretched hands, not clenched fists.

It's the 'someday' we have always dreamed of, emerging in the present, rising up among us and within us.

It's so different from what we expected — so much better.

Resurrection is what it means to be truly alive.

Resurrection is what it means to be on the way!

Walking the road to a new and better day." McLaren, *We Make The Road By Walking*, 170, modified.

As we each of us seek to enter into the flow of God, resurrection teaches us that in God's kingdom, dissolving into unity with God — yet with an abiding sense that we are each of us always and forever uniquely beloved — can both be true.

That the paradox of absolute unity — in our complete diversity — is God's ultimate gift.

God's ultimate miracle.

What that looks like and how it happens, leaves us as flummoxed as Thomas in his encounter with the risen Lord.

And yet, resurrection teaches us that with God, all things are not only possible, they are irrevocably promised.

+amen

