

People who had known Jesus were convinced
that they were in his presence well after he had died on the cross.

"I have seen the Lord."
That's what she tells us.
It's what Mary Magdalene said happened.

She was not alone.
People were running here and there.
Word got out.
Jesus was no longer in the tomb.
People could look in and see that.

Then Mary said he appeared to her.
Others said he appeared to them.
He will even grill some fish for his disciples.
But that comes later.

People began to gather and recount their experiences of him.
They followed his teachings – and kept his vision alive.

And for awhile he was there with them.

And – it is still a mystery.



I want to touch on three things in relation to this story.
First – a little historical perspective.

Second – I want to suggest that we let "resurrection" be a verb -
something we do or something we be -
rather than something we believe or not believe.

I am suggesting we let resurrection be a spiritual practice.

Third – Let's think about how we go about doing that –
perhaps the first thing we would do
to make resurrection a spiritual practice in our lives.



First – a little historical perspective:

This thing that happened – this experience described by John is out of the boundaries of reasonable human experience.

And yet – there is more documented evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived.

There is more evidence of the resurrection than there is that Alexander the Great died at age 33.

We accept many things as fact with little evidence.

The facts are that in the history of the ancient world the resurrection has been attested to as much as most of the events that we routinely accept and read in the history books.

Whatever happened was so compelling that people were willing to die for what they were convinced was real.

If something amazing had not occurred – it would have been the end of the story of the teacher from Nazareth named Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus - well - the evidence is overwhelming.

And yet most of us just don't know what to make of it.

I watched a television documentary a few days ago about the cloths that may have wrapped Jesus' body - what is called the shroud of Turin. Scientific studies have not disproved its authenticity. What they have done is verify that it is all still a mystery.

I tell you this because I want to invite you into the mystery.

The resurrection – is a mystery about the presence of God and action of God in your life and mine.

What I am getting at is that it is not so much something to believe happened or did not happen as it is something to happen within us.

It is one thing for someone to say,
"I believe in the resurrection."

But it is another thing to say -
"I experience it in my life."

Surely it is more important to experience resurrection
than to believe it happened to someone else.

I suggested to you in an e-letter on Friday
that we consider Easter – consider the resurrection of Jesus -
to be a verb – to be a spiritual practice.

How would we begin?



That took me back to the Garden of Gethsemane
just before Jesus was arrested
when he was alone in prayer.

Anyone remember what happened or did not happen?

They could not stay awake.
They fell asleep three times.

Waking up – to the awesome presence of God –
being attentive has got to be the first principle
of living the resurrection.

It is not the only one - but it is a great beginning.
I will mention a few more but just speak of one - right now.

If the resurrection is a spiritual practice in your life:

You will see more beauty.
You will pick up on ways to show compassion.

You will lean towards enthusiasm rather than boredom.
You will lean towards forgiveness when given the chance.

You will notice more moments of grace.

You will bring hope to someone who needs hope in their life.
You will feel more gratitude.

You will add more joy to the lives of those around you.
You will use your imagination more.

You will do some work for justice -
and participate in more acts of kindness.

You will find more meaning in your experiences.
You will nurture yourself – eat right, exercise, get enough rest.
Help God resurrect your own body.

You will sign peace treaties – so to speak
when you have been at war with someone in your life.
You will be open-minded.

When resurrection is a spiritual practice
you will play more.

Practice reverence for life.
Help others to nurture their sense of wonder.
You will plant more flowers.

When resurrection is a spiritual practice
we will have confidence that God can make something
out of our selfishness, anger, greed, hatred, and
any other of our shadow qualities.

That's a pretty big one.

When resurrection is a spiritual practice
we will cherish more moments.



How are these for resurrection principles?
They come about when we let resurrection be a verb.¹

I said I wanted to talk about one principle –
something to get us going.



I mentioned that in the garden before his arrest
Jesus kept asking his disciples to stay awake.

Don't let that get past you – without taking it seriously.
He is not the only religious teacher who wanted us to wake up.
The Buddha and Hindu sages were always telling people to wake up.

In a practical way – how do we do it?

This is how one spiritual teacher describes it.²

In some ways it is a way to become a better observer
of what happens in our lives.

Anybody ever had drama in your life?
Something happens. Somebody says or does something.
Then something else happens. And that causes something else.
And you get all caught up in it.

Drama is addicting. Some people have to have it.
Otherwise life is boring.
But when we have too much drama
it gets us way out of balance.
We lose ourselves.
It is like living on a fast merry-go-round.
It is hard to be attentive when you are on a fast merry-go-round.

When we start observing this in our life
we are much closer to the kind of mindfulness
with which the spiritual teachers live and teach.

It is the only way we can get off the merry-go-round
or even realize we are on one.



It's like watching ourselves compassionately
but with a little distance.
Then our emotions won't pull us one way or another.

Sometimes our thoughts just race back and forth.
It is easy to think we are just our thoughts.
But we are much more.

All the great religions recommend living in the moment -
being present to the moment at hand.
At first that sounds easy - but it is more complicated.
This is part of it.

We often spend time either living in the past
or living in the future.

We live in the past if
we hold on too long to those things we regret.
Think about a time when you just keep reviewing things
over and over and over that have already happened.

Or maybe we spend a lot of time
making assumptions or fantasizing about what could happen.

The trouble is that most of the time we will
lean too much toward the negative – or too much toward the positive.
And we get attached to what we think will happen.

Often we are unhappy with what does happen.


When we are either busy reliving the past
or predicting the future it is almost impossible
to "practice the presence of God."

Just being present to ourselves and God –
is not easy in our fast-paced lives.

But – it is a way to practice the resurrection -
by being present – being mindful – being awake
to the mystery of God – the mystery of the risen Christ.

Being present and attentive is just the first one of many
steps to living the resurrection as a spiritual practice.

It is a way to let go of believing or not believing it happened.
Just try to live it in your life.

I will explore a few more ways for the resurrection
to be a spiritual practice in our lives – next week.



So there is a little historical perspective -
and a way to think about what happened for your own life
in the here and now – to experience it as a verb
and finally learning to begin thinking about the ways we might do that.
And the first is to practice mindfulness – waking up to the present -
what God wants to do in our lives right now.



May this Easter bring new purpose, energy and joy to you.
May you be more content – more at peace in your life.
May you see more beauty and opportunity before you.
May the resurrection of Jesus mean more than it did before today.

Amen.

¹ This discussion is adapted from an article by Mary Ann and Frederic Brussat in *Spirituality and Practice*

² Richard Rohr. *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. Chapter 18