

Resurrection (Part Two)

“Why should any of you consider it incredible?”

Reflection 27 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

Sometimes maybe we – we believers in the resurrection of Christ and our own – are made to feel at a disadvantage because reason is perhaps set off in contrast to faith. But it is this that does not make sense. It’s based on a misunderstanding of what reason is. Reason is not an independent source of information; it’s a way of arranging, of logically organizing, whatever information one has. Every kind of systematic thought, every thought system, has to begin with some things taken for granted, some kind of faith position, some premise presumed. Science, for instance, begins with the assumption that nature is somehow intelligible. All knowledge begins with an act of faith. All knowledge! And all knowledge calls for personal commitment; that it, all knowledge calls for trust. It all does. Sooner or later, you have to make a commitment. You have to make a decision on what you will stand on.

In the end, it all comes down to how one best answers certain questions, questions such as: How do we best account for life as it is? What works? What offers hope? Down on street level and out in real life what are the real human needs? And how are they best satisfied? How do we best make sense of human experience as a whole? And in each case, for each question, it’s the story of Jesus that offers the deepest, highest and most comprehensive answers. It is resurrection that best accounts for life as it is, that works, that offers hope, that satisfies the real human needs. It is resurrection that best makes sense of human experience as a whole, that makes sense of death, and suffering and pain, and sin and failure and guilt – that makes sense of justice and injustice and assures us that these things will be worked out.

So a strong intellectual argument can be made. And some years ago, this is where I would have left it. But now I realize that I believe in the resurrected Jesus not because of an empty tomb but because of my own encounters with the living Christ. In my life. Now. I have seen, and I continue to see, Christ being formed in lives all around me (Galatians 4:19). I have come to understand what Paul meant when he said in his letter to the Colossians that the great secret of the universe is “Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27). I have felt Christ’s continuing presence with us even when just two or three of us gather in his name (Matthew 18:20), and especially when we take the bread and drink the cup. I now know that his message, his words, his truths, his way, transforms us. It works. Forgiveness works. Trust works. Overcoming our egos works. Leaving behind the things we’re attached to and obsessed with works. It brings us freedom, almost euphoria. Making peace works. And love never fails. Maybe everything else does, but love never fails.

And everywhere there are the reminders. As I drive down the Merritt Parkway in the glories of springtime or the even greater glories of autumn in New England, I am reminded, “Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” As I watch the sun come up over the Connecticut hills, as I listen to the stillness of fresh-fallen snow, as I consider the wonder of the nighttime sky filled with stars, as I look into the

wide open eyes of a newborn who is still filled with intimations of immortality, as I reflect on the wonder of science today, the marvel of subatomic reality or cellular reality, I am reminded, “Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”

Everywhere there are the reminders. Even in the spiritual classics of the East, where I did not expect to find them, I have found eyewitness accounts of resurrection. Even in the stories we tell one another – of a dying grandfather appearing to his grandson across town at the moment of his death, or of a friend just died appearing in a dream recognizably himself but transformed, aglow with celestial health – we witness to resurrection. We all know these stories, but then we go back to the darker, more fearful stories of these cynical times, and we forget.

So this I know. I know this from reading and reflecting on Scripture, from listening to stories from around the world, including stories from those who study near-death experiences, and from trusting the truth in my heart. One day we pass through death to life again. As we transition to this higher reality, we are met by someone, by a being of light who welcomes us and leads us lovingly through a life review. It seems almost instantaneous, but it covers it all, all the pain, all the triumph, all the joy and all the sadness, all the turning points, all the moments that shaped our character and in which we shaped the character of others. We are taken through it all not at all to be corrected or punished – God loves us – but so that we might be enlightened.

We are led to our eternal home which has been foreshadowed all along by the wonders of nature all around us. We find ourselves back in Eden, back in the garden of earthly delights walking with God in the cool of the day. We discover that Paradise has been entirely restored. As we venture farther into our eternal home, we begin to recognize first this, then that, then all of it. We discover to our wonder and joy that the world we love is preserved – only more rich and real than ever. We discover that the reason we so much loved certain places here on earth is because they somehow looked a little like heaven.

And we are introduced to our true life’s calling. We will never be bored. We have come to the most exciting place imaginable. We have begun the greatest adventure we’ve ever known. We take on the role for which we have been being prepared our whole lives on earth. And now we live out the deepest passion of our hearts, with all the freedom and all the power to do exactly what we were always meant to do.

We discover that God completes us. God is our lost wholeness. God is the other half of us. And now we live eternally in that God-given zone where life is lived at its most intensely, with its greatest energy, and where life is at its most colorful, vivid and purposeful.

It’s not that I will not ever doubt all this. Scripture is clear that even for the very first disciples at first this seemed like nonsense. But then they began to see that it had always – all of it, all of Scripture, all of their lives, all of history – been about resurrection. It went on like a light bulb, like a switch in the mind. That’s what happens. Suddenly you realize that it was always about resurrection. Suddenly you live in a world lit by

resurrection. It was and is always about new life, rebirth, resurrected lives, fathers and sons reconnecting, marriages being resurrected, love being resurrected, friendship being resurrected, by the power of trust and the art of forgiveness, dormant churches springing into life, hope and love and trust resurrected.

But it's like a switch turning on in the mind. One moment we thought we lived in a world where Caesar rules, and the self-centered seem to get ahead. The next we live in a world where Christ rules and those who get over themselves are the truly free ones. One moment we live in a world filled with fear and anger, with nationalistic pride and with violence. The next we live in a world being healed by forgiveness and the power of love, being made new by peacemakers. One moment we live in a world where religion is run by legalists and everything comes down to hair-splitting. The next we live in a world being reshaped by grace, opened up to the Spirit of God. One moment we live in a world where death reigns, where those closest to you die and you die. The next we live in a world lit by resurrection, knowing that we do live forever, and that all that is good and loving lasts forever. This is glorious! Are you up for it?

Maybe you're not up for it because you're in a bit of a dead zone – numbness spreading through your soul, life force reduced to a flicker, feeling powerless, drawing back from responsibility and commitment, more seriously drawing back from people, loving less, trusting less, fearing and suspecting more. It's a dead zone forming. I am tempted to give you advice. Be here more. Talk to so-and-so. Pray more. Work harder. But maybe what you need is not more advice. You know enough already. Listen to your heart. Stop and look and see. You need resurrection, a radical rebirth, a new start, a return to your original innocence, a recovery of your soul.

That's the point of Christian baptism, a dying to your old self, a rising to new life empowered by the Spirit of God. For others, maybe it's simply getting your mind back on the Gospel, on resurrection, to trust what you know in your heart to be true, to remember again that anything truly good and loving is possible, to wake up again in a world lit by resurrection and open to the Spirit of God, and then to do everything it takes to mindfully, consciously stay in that world.

– Dale Pauls