

“Rising from the Dead”  
February 14, 2021

II Corinthians 4:1-12  
Mark 9:2-10

Some of the best stories in the Bible do not speak to us directly in our present circumstances. Instead, they take us out of our familiar world, and carry us—however briefly—someplace we’ve never been. So in these strange days we have a strange need to hear stories like the one we heard this morning.

It might help us in making some sense of this story to start at the end.

As the terrified and confused disciples walk down the mountain with Jesus, he tells them to tell no one about what they have seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. And so they kept this incident to themselves and wondered what this “rising from the dead could mean.”

What could this rising from the dead mean?

We still puzzle about this, don’t we?

Resurrection is as much about this life as any other. When we speak in faith of the resurrection of the dead, we mean the power that allows us to start afresh, to begin again after failure or hardship, to stand up for what gives this life its deepest and greatest value.

This “rising from the dead”—we never completely grasp its meaning, but we experience that power in our lives enough to put our faith in it, to stake our lives upon it.

In these pandemic days, when it has often been difficult to see very far down the road, we have moved forward with a faith in resurrection. As vaccines are *slowly* beginning to be administered to more people, we have dared to look ahead a little farther, to imagine the new and different world that we will be creating and entering.

We imagine the contact with others that we have been missing.

We imagine the ease of movement that we once knew.

We imagine meeting in this place once more.

We imagine renewed commitment to curbing climate change, increasing racial justice, creating beauty.

What else do you imagine?

The account of the transfiguration seems out of place in the midst of the more earthy and mundane stories of Jesus teaching and healing and arguing and praying. In fact, many think it is a resurrection story that has been misplaced, relocated into the days of the ministry of Jesus.

And maybe that's the kind of story we need in these days. For we sense that our own lives have been misplaced, sidetracked. This out of place story encourages us through all the gloom of Lent and the gray late winter/early spring days ahead.

We are encouraged with the light of God that will continue to shine on our lives, raising us up.

On Christmas Eve we celebrated the light of God shining in the darkness.

On Epiphany Sunday we heard of the light of God in a star guiding sages to a place they did not know.

Now, on this, the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, we receive the good news that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This day, every day, God is doing something new.

Sometimes we need to know the past to understand the present. In this morning's scripture lesson, Paul takes us back to the very beginning. The God who said let light shine out of darkness is the Creator who has for all time been intimately involved with the Creation.

As one person put it, the question is not "Who turned on the lights?" but "Whatever for?"

The answer may very well be, "For love."

As we seek to know more of what rising from the dead means, we find ourselves embraced by the love of God. And in that embrace, we discover that, as Paul says: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."

To all appearances, Paul—and by extension all of us—was nothing more than an earthen vessel, a cheap clay pot. And yet, in Paul's time precious objects and treasures were regularly kept in such pots. Here in our flesh is something of great value.<sup>1</sup>

That treasure, Paul claims, is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What we see in Jesus is the very light of God. Along with Paul, you, too, carry this treasure beyond price.

Yes, you and I, we're just clay pots—but what a shining treasure is found inside!

And we are called to let that light shine through our actions in the world.

Which, of course, is where the problems arise.

We are clay pots—*human* beings, made of the earth. How does the hymn put it? "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail." We are fragile, easily broken, easily damaged. And some would say easily expendable.

The catalogue of human woes that Paul lists seems as though it could have been written in the past year: crushed, driven to despair, forsaken, and destroyed.

We might use other terms to describe the misfortunes that come to us and those we love and those we don't even know.

But we have the hope that while we are clay pots, God's power is made perfect in our weakness and fragility. That power is there with us to balance every outside circumstance and every interior thought that would hold us back. The promise is not that our troubles will pass away with time or that they only *appear* to be troubles, or that a way out of them will eventually be found. The troubles we face are real and some may *never* disappear—yet the power of God is there to bring us through them.

When we grasp this, we are closer to grasping what “rising from the dead” means.

This story of what is called the “transfiguration” of Jesus is often read on this final Sunday before the beginning of Lent. As we move toward a time of thinking about our own mortality—and even more about the life-giving death and resurrection of Jesus—the curtain of reality is pulled back so that we can see where we are heading.

We get a glimpse of the *glory* of God—that feeling aroused in us by bright, concentrated light, bringing forth often unexpected joy and happiness, beauty and the thrill of great power and meaning, the overflowing of all that is cherished and desired.

In that light, perhaps we can see ourselves as a *community of transfiguration*. We aren't able to offer a neat solution to every problem. But we can offer something needed even more—a vision of our human condition as wounded but gloriously whole. We can speak of resurrection, of God's power to bring life out of death, health out of decay.

We can hold out the possibility that something positive can come even from the worst of situations, even from death on a cross. This rising from the dead means that there is a power that can still bring new life to our lives, and to our community, our nation, and our world.

And so, as Paul would suggest, we do not lose heart. We have a ministry here. God calls us to remind ourselves and others that we are becoming a new creation. We are called to announce that good can come out of evil, life out of death, light out of shadows.

Will the world, or this city, be changed by what we say, what we do? Probably not all of it, though perhaps a part. What is especially important is that we remain faithful to what we have seen in the transfigured Christ—the vision of God remaking a broken world.

These are days of becoming. We need each other.

These are days of becoming. God knows what we will become as we are changed from glory into glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Page: 2

See discussion in Interpretation commentary on II Corinthians.