

The “After” Life

Psalm 30

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

2 O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

3 O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit

4 Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

5 For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

6 As for me, I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved.’

7 By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.

8 To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication:

9 ‘What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit?

Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?

10 Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!’

11 You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

This psalm attests to the universal human experience that life is a roller-coaster. This person has been up and has been down, way down, nearly to the bottom, more than once. How do I know more than once? In one of those “low” moments when he was desperately seeking God’s help, he appeals to the rational side of God and says, “What would you gain from letting me die? Will the dust from my ashes tell of your faithfulness?” See, he knows; he has experienced God’s faithfulness before, scooping him up from Sheol, the place of oblivion, every time calamity struck and threw him down. Whether it was a social enemy plotting his demise or a betrayal of a friend, a serious physical illness or another form of ruin, he’d been there and God rescued him, time and again, and so he is confident God will save.

As of the time of writing this psalm, he is at a still point, a steady place, standing firmly on the knowledge of God’s faithfulness. From that place, he recalls the agony he lived through *before* he came to know God’s faithfulness, and from there he can also look towards the future to sing God’s praise in thanksgiving, because of what God has done and will surely do. He is in that pivotal place, a decisive moment for embracing this God of faithfulness; it is a moment of crisis when everything in his life is changed. What was the night of weeping, mourning, and wearing the sackcloth of grief and remorse “before,” becomes the joy that comes in the morning,

dancing, and more joy “after” the psalmist comes to trust in the faithfulness of God. He is now a believer, one who has faith, and invites other faithful ones to join him in singing God’s praises and giving thanks. He will not shut up about it but bear witness to the goodness of the Lord, forever.

I think it is safe to say, most of us here have lived long enough to know what that roller-coaster ride of life feels like. And if I were to speak from my own experience, I never seem to have enough faith of my own to keep me from falling into yet another pit. Perhaps over potluck lunch, I’ll tell you mine and you tell me yours, the pit, I mean.

And life, as we live it on this earth, seems to keep throwing you into “situations” regardless of how “faithful” I am. The challenges in life, like those the psalmist intimated, don’t just disappear just because we live as Christians. So, how can we live from that still point, with that perspective of the morning of joy, when everything seems to be going down the pit, our place in the world, our body, our world.

What is our still point, the crisis in our life that offers hope that moves us from the life “BEFORE” of hopelessness and despair to the “AFTER” life of joy, hope, and gratitude to the Lord our God.

The Gospel writer John shows us how it was for the disciples, how, or rather who turned their night of weeping into the joy in the morning. Hear now the concluding chapter of the gospel according to John, Chapter 21: 1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ 6 He said to them, ‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now

none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ 16 A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ 17 He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.’ 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

Although the writer says this was the “third time” Jesus appeared to the disciples, it was really the “fourth time,” if you counted Jesus’ appearing to Mary Magdalene before anyone else. And Mary Magdalene was surely a disciple, even a model disciple, and yet she did not recognize the risen Jesus until he called her name, Mary.

Then, Jesus showed himself to the eleven, first without Thomas, and then with Thomas. We tend to think it was only Thomas who needed to see the wounds in Jesus’ hands and his side in order to believe it was Jesus, because he’s the only one who asked for it, but Jesus had shown his hands and his side to all disciples, even before they asked. Knowing what they needed in order to recognize him, Jesus literally showed himself to them, which is what the original Greek word for “to appear” mean.

Even before we know what we need to come to see the risen Jesus, Jesus knows exactly what it is and provides it for us. It is God who enables us to recognize the risen Christ and it is God’s will that we recognize him.

All these instances of Jesus showing up had been in Jerusalem, the locus of the religious and political power-that-be of his world, where he had met his death on the cross, and where God had raised him from death, overcoming the power of the human sin and defeating death as the last word forever. The power of God in full display; that’s glory.

After all these things, begins today’s passage, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples, but this time by the Sea of Tiberius, which is in Galilee, their home country. The disciples had received the Holy Spirit from the risen Christ in Jerusalem, and yet, unsure of what to do, they

had returned home, to what they knew. They, whom Jesus had made to fish for people were back fishing again for fish. They had gone back to the life of “before” meeting their Lord.

There, they fished all night with no success. Then the morning arrives and the risen Jesus appears. When he called to them from the shore, “got fish?” they had nothing to show, and so Jesus told them what to do, enabling them to catch a miraculously large number of fish. At that moment, that feeling of abundant provision, abundance of gifts the disciple who was most attuned to Jesus’ presence, a/k/a the disciples Jesus loved, recognized Jesus and told Peter, “it is the Lord.” This prompts Peter, who does not always perceive correctly but acts most enthusiastically, to jump into the water to get to Jesus as soon as he could. These two disciples complement each other, one recognizes and the other acts. Jesus loves and needs them both in his flock, the church. DNA of both of them live in each one of us as his disciple.

When the rest of the disciples got to the shore, Jesus invites them to “come have breakfast,” but it is Jesus who “comes to them, takes the bread and gives to them. He did the same with the fish, creating a table fellowship that was the mark of the community of the faithful, as it is for us today.

The Risen Jesus may be the only Jesus we experience in our earthly lives. The incarnate Jesus, who walked on the earth, we know only through the witness of the Scriptures. But we can still have our moment of encounter with the risen Christ, our crisis, when we recognize the risen Jesus in our lives, and know we are free from the grip of doubt and despair forever, living in the “AFTER” life of Christ’s resurrection. We have seen the Lord.

The risen Jesus will make himself known to us in the abundance of his gifts in our lives. It may not be a large number of fish, but Jesus meets our needs with abundance, empowering us to do what we are called to do. Sometimes, it is in the moment of our deepest need, a difficult period in our lives that had us captive, we look back and realize God had indeed provided all that we needed.

And that is not all. Everything the risen Jesus does for us in our personal lives is also for the building of this community of the faithful. Peter is personally empowered, enabled, but it is not for his personal benefit but for the sake of the church, Jesus’ flock. What’s miraculous in Peter’s life is that the risen Jesus empowers Peter, who denied him three times, to love and follow him for real now, tending his flock and feeding his sheep. Earlier, Peter himself did not have it in him to love Jesus in word and deed and follow him to the end. Now Jesus asks Peter if he loved

him, three times, overturning each one of Peter's denials with forgiveness and even entrusting him to feed his sheep.

In this, we learn that to know Jesus is to love him, and our love for Jesus immediately translates into loving others Jesus loved.

For many of us, Easter may have become a celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus ages ago, who suffered the death on the cross at the hand of the sinful world, and was raised, so we may die to sin and be raised to Eternal Life with him. But this Eternal Life begins in the crisis of our recognizing the risen Christ in our own lives and to follow him. Even the disciples didn't recognize the risen Jesus at first, but thanks to the witness of the Scripture, we know the risen Christ is among, whenever we see our needs met when we are in need, whenever we come together at the Lord's Table. Whenever we feel it in our hearts to reach out to all God's precious children in need in love for the sake of Jesus.

We are on a new journey of learning to follow the risen Christ and we do it together, loving one another, tending to the needs of another. With that, we love Jesus back, in this "AFTER" life of the resurrection, now. May it be so. Amen.