

Resurrected Through Conflict Resolution

Easter Reflection

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Trinity United Ottawa

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To celebrate Easter this morning, I'm going to read you a 'resurrection story' of our day. Its about how a conflict was resolved, between a grandmother-to-be and a pair of teenage boys who scared the heck out of her.

But first, let's have a look at the resurrection story that circulated around 100 AD in the writings of the Gospel of John. We know that on Good Friday' in B.C. (?) the historical conflict between the Roman Empire and the occupied Hebrew people of Judea, came to a violent crisis in the crucifixion of their prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. We call that terrible day 'good' because Jesus' dying opened the way to his resurrection, his transformation, his transcendence of death in an enduring holy presence among us that we call 'the risen Christ.'

Christ, crucified, is alive again! This Truth is 'known' to us in many different ways. We can find meaning in resurrection - the ultimate Christian call to hope - at many different levels. The empty cross and the empty tomb take some absorbing. Even at the time of writing of John's Gospel, a couple of generations after Jesus' death, we have Mary Magdalene at first unable to believe the evidence of her own eyes and ears. It takes her a while to process her own profound spiritual experience of Jesus' presence after his death. And we have Peter and the other male disciples, unable to believe Mary's testimony about the risen Christ. They need to go to the tomb themselves to absorb the evidence that it is empty, and come to their own conclusions. What do they make of it?

However we may choose to 'believe' in Jesus resurrected, the Easter story survives because we can all partake of its hope. Jesus' resurrection is our affirmation and assurance, that even out of conflict, cruelty and death, God works creatively in us, to make new life possible.

Jesus died because he lived his pursuit of ‘peace through justice’, publicly demonstrating God’s Kingdom alternative to Rome’s proclaimed ‘peace through victory by the sword.’ Beyond his crucifixion Jesus lives on, as the Christ who transcended the injustice done to him, through forgiveness and love.

The resurrection story of Jesus inspires us to transcend our conflicts too. To choose the path that leads not to winning while others lose, but to open-hearted compassion that helps everyone to achieve healing justice. Moving with resurrection consciousness through even our worst life crises, we too can be touched by the God of Compassion and arise. We stand to be amazed by how open-hearted communication and recognizing each other’s humanity, will not only resurrect broken relationships, but take us to new levels of loving that transform our lives.

For the six Sundays of Lent, we have been exploring themes of conflict and resolution. Hopefully, our Lenten Journey through the Cross-roads of Conflict has exercised our resurrection faith in significant, personal ways. On Friday, some of us gave up the stones we were carrying, at the Cross. Having done what we could to resolve our own conflicts, and the conflicts in our world, we have prayerfully handed over our concerns to our Easter God, who makes all things anew this day.

For some, this Lenten journey has been hard work. When we choose to see our self and that ‘other’ with our spiritual eyes wide open, it isn’t easy to believe what we see! But I give thanks, because it seems there are some new faith stories among us at Trinity this Easter morning. Stories of resurrection hoped for and forgiveness being genuinely felt.

Let’s celebrate all our Alleluia experiences of life restored and transformed this Eastertide, through this story in Kenneth Cloake’s book “The Crossroads of Conflict: A Journey into the Heart of Dispute Resolution.” I hear this as a 21st Century resurrection story, full of Easter hope for the Kin-dom coming. It’s called: ‘Washing Our Sins’

Roberta was driving home from work on the freeway when her windshield suddenly shattered. She slammed on the brakes and narrowly averted a collision with the cars around her. A police investigation revealed that two young kids, aged 12 and 14, had been throwing rocks at passing cars from a freeway overpass. They were arrested, but because it was their first offense, the prosecuting attorney's office referred the case to a juvenile victim-offender mediation program. It took some effort to convince Roberta to mediate, as she was afraid at first to meet her attackers. Ultimately, she agreed to mediate with the two juveniles, Phil and Tim, together with their aunt who was raising them because their mother was working out of town and their father had disappeared. Phil and Tim were also reluctant to meet with Roberta, but their only alternative was to face prosecution in Juvenile Court and a possible jail sentence.

The mediator asked Roberta to begin, to be completely honest, and to tell Phil and Tim what they had done to her and how it made her feel. She pointed a finger directly at them and said in a tense, angry, accusatory voice, "You little s.o.b.'s; you almost killed me! I am going to be a grandmother next month and you almost killed me", and she began to sob. Phil and Tim, who were frightened just to attend the mediation, were now completely terrified and also began to cry. The victim they had never stopped to imagine, except as a faceless nonentity, had suddenly turned into a real, angry, frightened grandmother they had nearly killed.

On seeing Phil and Tim burst into tears, Roberta realized that the "hardened criminals" she had imagined were just children. Phil, the fourteen-year-old, spoke. Sobbing, he told Roberta he was sorry, that he hadn't meant to hurt anyone, that they had just been playing and he hadn't thought about the harm they might cause. Tim said, "It's all my fault. I was the one who threw the rock. I'm sorry," and they both began to cry again.

On hearing their willingness to accept responsibility, Roberta softened and began to speak to them directly insisting that they take responsibility for the damage they had caused.

The mediator asked Roberta what she thought Phil and Tim might do to prove to her that they were willing to accept responsibility for what they had done. She said what she really wanted before the mediation began was for them to pay for a new windshield, but she now understood their circumstances and saw that they were not old enough to find paying jobs.

She offered instead that they might come to her house once a week for three months and wash her car. Phil and Tim eagerly agreed. We set a date, wrote up their agreements, and ended the mediation with the idea that it was now up to them to reverse the harm they had caused.

At first, Roberta was anxious about inviting Phil and Tim to her house, but when they came, behaved respectfully, and worked hard to clean her car, she began to relax. It became clear to her while they were washing her car that they were also washing away their sins and cleansing their guilt, and she began to experience forgiveness.

The second time they came, she offered them some milk and cookies. The third time, she invited them into her house and they talked about school and their lives. At the end of the three months, they had begun to be friends, and Roberta decided to pay them an allowance to take out her garbage and perform small tasks around the house.

Several years later, when Phil was about to graduate from high school, Roberta asked him what he was going to do, and he said he didn't know. She encouraged him to go to college, but he said he couldn't afford it... Guess who agreed to pay his tuition?

It would have been impossible for Roberta or Phil or Tim to imagine at the beginning how this conflict would end, not just with restitution, but with redemption, transcendence, and real forgiveness. By communicating deeply and honestly and with open hearts, they were able to resolve their conflict and to

transcend the conditions that created it, revealing a far greater possibility. Each of them was able to find at the centre of their conflict a path leading directly to their own transformation and transcendence.

At our Cross-roads, faced with our conflicts - personal and global - we are learning to exercise our true Easter faith. As followers of Jesus of Nazareth, we trust in the God who leads, empowers and accompanies us through conflict, on a path that is redeeming for all. With hope buoyed by this alleluia community of ours, let us wear our Easter faith as compassion, forgiveness and the pursuit of just resolutions. What better way to keep Christ alive in our time? What better way to live what we believe: That Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!