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**Easter People**

Ever since that first Easter morning, scholars and theologians have been trying to explain exactly what happened after Jesus died on the cross... trying to wrap their minds around the resurrection experience and understand it through reason and facts. Others have taken a more mystical approach, allowing God some mysteries that we can't comprehend with our heads, but can only be understood by the heart. For me, what is more important than the specifics and the *how's* of the resurrection, is the result... what happened next because of that resurrection experience, and how does **that** continue to ripple out into our lives today?!

Clarence Jordan, a New Testament scholar once wrote: *"The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship; not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church."*

The religious leaders and Roman officials who were threatened by Jesus' teachings and presence in Jerusalem, thought that executing him by crucifixion would eliminate the threat he posed. But the movement he started did not end with his death. As a result of the experiences of that first Easter morning and the witness shared by those who saw the Risen Lord, Jesus was resurrected in the people who believed in his message of hope and justice and who followed his example. They felt his presence among them, and this inspired them to transform their lives with passion and courage for the sake of the world. They began a small but passionate uprising in the confident hope that they could create a better and more just society.

The Sadducees and Romans who feared that Jesus was a threat to the status quo of empire were right, but they were wrong thinking that he was stirring up a political insurgency to overthrow the Roman government. The uprising of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus was different than any other rebellion they had seen before. The way of Jesus is a conspiracy of love, compassion, justice, and peace. He called for economic justice, he shared meals with outcasts and the hungry masses. He stood up for his beliefs at the seat of political and religious power by teaching in the synagogues, rebuking the Pharisees, and

challenging the money changers outside the Jerusalem temple. He was executed for daring to challenge the status quo that benefited those in power.

But they could not keep him down for long... somehow, beyond my comprehension and 21<sup>st</sup> century reasoning mind, Christ rose on the third day, and the spiritual awakening and justice movement that he had lit the spark of, flamed back to life! Jesus was not the only one resurrected on that Easter morning... so were his followers and all who heard their testimony and passion. The new hope that was resurrected that day was infectious, and even today, we can live into the spirit of resurrection. We become Easter people when we live by the hope that never dies. When we believe that love conquers hate and we commit to living into the way of justice and peace, even when that means facing down systems of power and oppression.

In the late '70's, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was one who passionately and faithfully lived out this resurrection spirit. He stood up to the corrupt, violent, and unjust political system of his country, urged the rich to share what they had with the poor, and condemned the military's violence on their own people. For Romero, this was not about meddling in politics. It was simply preaching the Gospel and defending human life.

Romero was bitterly attacked and labeled both a communist and a terrorist by the wealthy, by the military, and by many conservative sectors of the church. He once told a newspaper reporter, *"I have often been threatened with death. I must tell you, as a Christian, I do not believe in a death without resurrection. If am killed, I shall arise again in the Salvadoran people."* Unfortunately, like too many who live out the uprising and kingdom work that Jesus came to usher in, Archbishop Romero was silenced, shot down in the middle of celebrating communion on March 24, 1980. Today, Romero's martyrdom is still celebrated in popular culture. "They can kill the prophet, but not the voice of justice," sing those who have risen to continue his work.

We continue to experience the power of resurrection and see the hope of Easter in the lives and even tragic deaths of faithful justice workers like Romero, and Martin Luther King, and the list goes on! Resurrection happens whenever the followers of Jesus have the passion and courage to confront the powerful in the name of the powerless. French theologian Jacques Ellul wrote: "Christians were never meant to be normal. We've always been holy troublemakers; we do not accept the world as it is, but we insist on the world becoming the way that God wants it to be. And the Kingdom of God is different from the patterns of this world."

I don't know if you feel it, but there is something stirring within our country, and it looks a lot like this passion and courage of the early Jesus followers, the Easter people who wouldn't let the hateful powers of Good Friday win the day. Those who fought for love, for justice, and weren't afraid to speak truth to power! I see Easter people marching all across our nation, standing up for love and for justice. People who refuse to give up hope, who believe that love CAN conquer hate, and are ready to raise their voice and face down the systems of

power and oppression in our day. People of all ages and faiths who are picking up the mantle and the work of Easter people. The question is, do we have the courage and passion to join them?!?

Being Easter people means that in the face of defeat, we will arise and stand once more. Despite overwhelming odds, amid deepest despair, we will continue to rise. For in the darkest days, hope rises and will not be extinguished. Love rises and will not die. In and through our struggles against threatening powers and principalities, whenever we rise, Jesus too rises again, and again, and again. He rises through our protests against war, injustice, and suffering. He rises in our uprisings for justice and peace. Jesus rises through us and in us. When we stand up, speak out, and act with passion and courage our lives boldly proclaim to the world: "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!" Thanks be to God!