



Nazareth Letter April 2024 Staying With Resurrection

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On Easter morning I took the night tube to St Martin's and joined the Easter dawn service. This service is always the highlight of the year for me. The retelling of God's story unfolds so dramatically. It's a physical and spiritual journey from the cold of night and the church in darkness to the light and warmth of fellowship, from the church in silence to bells and singing, from fire to font to Eucharist and then feasting. What is so special about this service is the way it gathers such an eclectic mix of people, strangers, seekers, people housed and unhoused, who by the end of the service all gather equally around beautifully decorated tables in the hall downstairs feasting on a cooked breakfast, generously prepared at the crack of dawn, just like the first disciples.

This year over breakfast I had a particularly memorable encounter with a young girl who had just walked off the streets and found herself caught up in this drama of resurrection. She had been completely blown away by the joyful singing and liturgy, which was her first ever Easter dawn service. Over the meal she shared how things had been really tough for her over recent months, but that the morning's service and the warmth of hospitality she had received had "opened her up", enlivened and lifted her out of her despair. Her face broke out into a radiant smile. "It's been a great morning and the day has only just begun!" She proclaimed. This was resurrection. God gifting us resurrection not just 2000 years ago but here and now again today.

It got me thinking how can we live resurrection today as if we are experiencing it for the first time like those first disciples. What difference does resurrection make in our lives after all? Let's face it most of us don't feel resurrected most of the time. It's so easy to slip back into the drudgery of everyday routine in a lifeless, tired kind of way. I'd like to share some pointers for living in Eastertide inspired by Eugene Peterson's book called *Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life*.

Resurrection Wonder

Having 50 days of Eastertide is an invitation to seek out Easter joy and the wonder of the resurrection each day in prayer, in outdoor spaces, in encounters with strangers and in other darker and uncertain places in our lives where we might struggle to find hope. Without wonder in our lives we can slip into a spiritual formation that's more akin to a self-help project. Wonder and awe lift us out of ourselves, to see beyond the

fears and obstacles of the day and to imagine new possibilities.

Resurrection Openness

On Easter morning it was the young girl's words "I've been opened up" that have stuck with me since Sunday. That's the power of resurrection. To be opened out. To be opened from death to life in all its abundance, from darkness to light, from fear to fearlessness, from despair to hope.

Luke chapter 24, the final chapter of the gospel of St Luke, has multiple references to things being opened up. The open tomb, the opened eyes of the disciples, the open home of hospitality, the opened scriptures and opened understanding, even the heavens being opened at the ascension, and the power and discipline needed by the disciples to stay in the city with faith hope and joy waiting for the Spirit to come. I wonder where you need opening up at this time. I wonder what helps you keep open to the transforming presence of the risen Christ all around you.

Resurrection Sabbath

So much of our society places ourselves at the centre of things. As a resurrection people how can we invite Christ to be our centre – to work in us and direct us and still us and love us? Eugene Peterson proposes we need to live with an "*acquired passivity*". In which he says "It is not what we do that matters; it is what we participate in". In other words, we need a willing passivity to model Sabbath living, to model quiet listening and loving and noticing, to model not rushing about for one's own kingdom but nurturing a quiet attentiveness to God's kingdom. I wonder how we might cultivate a resurrection life by renouncing a frenetic lifestyle.

Perhaps these next 50 days could be a good opportunity to practice Sabbath rest, and deepened attentiveness to God in our midst and in our neighbour. Help us, O Risen Christ, to love more and fear less. Help us, O Risen Christ, to enter Sabbath rest as a free gift and celebration.

Resurrection from Death

Karl Barth makes a pithy observation "Only where graves are is there resurrection." In other words, we each carry our own darkness: pain, grief, uncertainty, fears. A resurrection life is practiced when we acknowledge and befriend this darkness but don't let it consume us. Rather we allow the Light of Christ into the cracks and wounds of our lives. We lift our eyes to the horizon beyond our own darkness and beyond our own need to be in control, and our own need to be at the centre of things.

One way to live beyond our own darkness is to remember our baptism every day and be faithful to it. It is through baptism that we rediscover our true God-given identities. That's why we collectively renew our baptismal vows on Easter morning. Through repentance, forgiveness and the refreshing waters of baptism, we are known. We are loved. We are precious in God's sight. We are affirmed as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Resurrection Stories

You might like to have a daily practice of reading the resurrection stories in the gospels. These are some of the most vivid and life defining stories in the bible. Let these narratives jump off the page and shape your thinking and being and praying. I wonder how these stories inspire you to record your own resurrection moments today.

Resurrection Meals

Finally, perhaps most poignantly of all is the fact that my conversation with this girl

on Easter morning would not have happened had it not been for the physicality of a breakfast. A shared meal. Never forget that every single shared meal around a table is a sacramental event and an opportunity for God's revelation. It was the physicality of feasting together that opened doors and triggered kindness and deepened sharing. I wonder how you might share in a meal this Eastertide asking God to surprise you and bless you, as you bless others.

Resurrection Friends

As I departed from St Martins on Sunday morning to return to Matt's church for further Easter celebrations I gave this young girl a bunch of flowers from our table. "Let these flowers remind you of the joy of the risen Christ this morning" I said. She smiled with great delight and went on her way.

Bible Passage Luke 24: 36 - 49

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Wonderings

I wonder what stones lie in your path to prevent you from receiving resurrection joy.

I wonder what helps you fear less and love more.

I wonder what spiritual practices help you draw closer to the risen Christ in Eastertide.

Catherine Duce