

Resurrection Musings from our Mid Council Leaders

From the Lead Presbyter for Transformation

Thursday, April 17, 2025

From Maundy Thursday to Good Friday

When I lived and worked in New York City in the early 1980s, the administrative assistant in the Youth and Young Adult program office for the UPCUSA/PC(USA) would often tell me of the Broadway shows that he had seen and encouraged me to go to the shows. He would say that I could go and get standing room tickets on the day of the show. He knew that my salary didn't leave a lot of extra cash to buy Broadway show tickets.

I believe that you can still get these "Standing Room Only" tickets when shows are sold out.

As we move through Maundy Thursday and into the next scene of Jesus' life, we read in John's gospel chapter 18, that Jesus is in a garden. This garden was a familiar place where Jesus often met the disciples. Judas knew this familiar place and he arrived with "soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons" (John 18:3). Jesus asked Judas and these others, " 'Whom are you looking for?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them" (John 18:5).

Victoria Atkinson White wrote an entry in the book *Feasting on the Gospels* that several people take a stand in this John passage. White writes, "Judas takes the first stand. It is one of opposition." She continues to write that Jesus takes the next stand in this passage. We would think that Jesus would "... stand against evil and darkness and pronounce his power of Judas ..." but Jesus "... makes his stand, though, with gentleness, peace and truth ..." White writes that "Jesus ... takes control of what seems to be chaos in the dark and light, temple and state, peace and weapons, good and evil."

The next person to take a stand in this passage is Peter. It is a "... stand of violence, and even then Jesus maintains control," White writes. "He is confident, composed, and in control," White continues and says "... although this does not mean he [Jesus] wants what will happen or desires any of it, he has come to terms with the cup set before him, and he stands ready to drink the cup the Father has given him."

At the end of her writing, White asks, “What is the cup set before your church? Your family? Your community? Are you clear in your sense of who you are and whose you are, such that it gives you a firm foundation upon which to stand? ... What is the cup set before you? Are you willing to take a stand for it?”[1]

I did see a Broadway show by “Standing Room Only.” I was a spectator of wonderful acting and sets. I stood alright, but not like the disciples or Jesus in this passage. As a follower of Jesus, I am more than a mere spectator. I am called to stand and to take action. Each of us is called to stand up and act in different ways. We must respect how each of us is called by God to stand and act.

As disciples of Jesus, may we stand and act, and may our standing be done in confidence that God claims us. And may we understand as we follow Jesus to the cross, that we gain hope and life through his death and resurrection.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Greg Garis

[1] Victoria Atkinson White, “Pastoral Perspective – John 18:1-11, in *Feasting on the Gospels: John*, Vol 2,” eds Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015) 242–246.

From the Synod Transitional Leader

Thursday, April 17, 2025

Resurrection Living in 2025

What does it mean to live a resurrection life in 2025?

Before we answer too quickly, let us take a sobering look at the world around us. Fear—real, palpable fear—is a daily companion for many. We are living in uncertain times, and for some, it feels like we are only at the beginning of what could become even more troubling days. Within our own Synod, we know beloved siblings facing job loss, the threat of deportation, and disempowerment. Our prayers are with those directly affected and those who are actively, earnestly accompanying those whose lives have been turned upside down.

And by prayer, I don't mean the comfortable cadence of worship words or the polite promise, "I'll pray for you." Prayer is active. It is earth-shattering. It can move mountains and calm our troubled seas. Yet, we find ourselves living between two realities: the things we can change and the things that only change through patience, faithfulness, and strategy.

So again, what is resurrection living?

What is your favorite resurrection song?

As we move from Were You There on Good Friday and He Never Said a Mumbling Word through Holy Saturday's silence, I long to sing Because He Lives. That anthem says it all: "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow." Tomorrow with all its possibility for both harm and healing, cannot overcome what happened at the empty tomb... when Mary heard her name called, when the disciples' hearts burned at the table, and when good news was proclaimed to all who trust in Christ.

The Book of Acts ends without a conclusion. Why? Scholars believe it's because the story continues—with us. With each generation of believers, the witness unfolds. This is our time to write the next chapter of the 21st-century Church. And no, it will not be a tidy, sanitized story. It will include struggle. It will bear witness to our wrestling for a unified voice in the midst of deep political and theological divides. Historians may note how the Church at times diminished its message of love through inconsistent hospitality and hollow welcomes. They may critique how we lived out a theology of scarcity instead of abundance.

But they will also tell the story of resurrection people.

They will remember that in a time of despair, there were congregations and presbyteries that reimagined what it meant to be Church in the world. Even amid storm clouds, there were glimpses of light breaking through. That there were prophetic voices who hoped against hope. And mission was not just to, but with—a sacred accompaniment. That there were dedicated laborers in the vineyard who refused to give up.

An unknown author once wrote "Easter is not a time for groping through dusty, musty tomes or tombs to disprove spontaneous generations or even to prove life eternal. It is a day to fan the ashes of dead hope, a day to banish doubts and seek the slopes where the sun is rising—to revel in the faith which transports us out of ourselves and the dead past into the vast and inviting unknown."

This is our season.

I hesitate to overuse the phrase, but truly—for such a time as this, we are called. We were born into this moment, this complex era where easy answers do not satisfy. We live between binaries—possibility and impossibility. And in that liminal space, the resurrection must mean something. It must mean everything.

When Jesus arrived after Lazarus's death, he asked Martha, "Do you believe?" And then he declared, "I am the resurrection and the life." Resurrection is not just about what happens after death. It is about how we live now. It's not just about avoiding the fate of zombie churches and the walking dead. It's about living with a peace that surpasses understanding—even when things are not okay. It's about reclaiming our values, reshaping our language, and telling the Good News in ways that breathe life.

Call me optimistic. Call me a dreamer. I am both. But I am not naïve.

I believe what the Scriptures say that God is for us and wills life for our good. I also believe that what is not yet redeemed in our lifetimes will one day be reconciled. After all this time, I cannot start thinking differently. My faith will not allow me to equate suffering with divine absence. Evil and despair will not have the final word. That's the story of Holy Week—of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Morning.

And let us not forget the sacred wisdom of our musical prophets. In *Come Sunday*, John Coltrane draws from the spiritual imagination of the Black Church, capturing both the ache and the assurance of resurrection living. Teaching us that melody is more than jazz, it is prayer, it is protest, and it is promise. It reminds us that Sunday morning always comes, even after the darkest night.

Finally, remember this word from the prophet Jeremiah, spoken to a people in exile, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have children... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

Resurrection living is not a distant dream. It is a call to life—here, now, today. To build. To plant. To love. To sing. To hope.

Because Christ lives—we live too.

Rev. SanDawna Gaulman Ashley