

Easter B
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Trinity Episcopal Church
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Choosing Resurrection

Isaiah 25: 6-9; Acts 10: 34-43; John 20: 1-8

“Alleluia, Christ is Risen!” (“The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!”).

One of our favorite mantras at Trinity is *“Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome!”* No matter how many times you gave up on your Lenten resolutions; whether or not you even HAD Lenten resolutions; whether this is your first time in church since Christmas... or even some Easter years ago; *“Welcome.”* Some of you might think of this simply as an extravagant welcome, but it’s actually the message of Easter.

It reflects our deeply held belief that, at every moment, the risen Christ is very near, willing to make of each of us a new creation, that Christ is better than our very worst. Christ’s goodness is more potent than our most potent evil. Sin and death and everything in between are simply no match for the risen Christ. In Christ, there is always an invitation to new life. And the miracle of resurrection is that it occurs in the most improbable places.

Two years ago, the Senior Rabbi at Yale and I took an extraordinary trip to Poland with a group of each of our students. Rabbi Cohen and I had been teaching them all year in a seminar titled, “Profiles in Moral Courage,” focused on what we could learn from the Holocaust.

Over spring break, we travelled to Berlin, Warsaw, Krakow and Auschwitz.

It was an extraordinary experience of trying to absorb horror on an unimaginable scale, while opening ourselves to the individual stories of righteous Gentiles who had tried to save Jewish families, of Jewish families who had to pretend to become Christians in order to survive, of young people newly discovering their Jewish heritage, of a young democracy just beginning to cope with the reality of its own troubled history.

Before World War II, 75% of the world’s Jews lived in Poland, sharing a thousand – year history in the one country most tolerant of their presence. By the end of the war, nearly all of them had been murdered and their synagogues destroyed. Then, under communism, those who remained were offered a ticket to anywhere else, if they would only renounce their Polish citizenship. Today Poland is 98% Roman Catholic.

We left Poland on Good Friday, and all I could think of as I reflected on each personal story, was that, if any day could capture the experience of God’s chosen people in Poland, it was Good Friday.

And that’s when it struck me what a miracle we had witnessed everywhere we went. Jewish Poles who survived by being adopted and raised as Christians were discovering their Jewish roots, and sharing them with their children. New Jewish institutions – museums and community centers and synagogues – were beginning to spring up.

Jews and Christians from near and far had come to Poland to help. With seminaries, rabbis emigrated from Russia, Israel and America. “*Where are you from?*” I asked the Curator of the new Museum of Jewish Culture, “*Columbia University,*” she replied. I asked the Chief Rabbi of Poland the same question. “*Brooklyn, of course,*” he replied.

Attending Shabbat services in a community center one night, I commented to the Uzbekistani Rabbi who was leading the service, how informal and flexible it seemed, compared to others I’d attended. And he said, “*Yes, these folks have almost no Jewish traditions, so I call this service Reformadox.*” And I pondered our Christian ideas of “*emerging church,*” our need to re – invent ourselves to be understandable to a generation who’s grown up with either no experience of church, or a negative one. And I thought, “*Wow, do we have a lot to learn from these courageous pioneers.*”

And isn’t that what “*resurrection living*” is all about? Coming to believe, again and again, just when we’ve nearly forgotten what it means to be a Christian, that God keeps tilling the soil of our hardened hearts to help grow new life there? Coming to understand, again and again, that God keeps inspiring us to overcome our resistance, to get out of bed on a Sunday morning, and join with our fellow Christian backsliders by becoming apart of a faith community? And experiencing such joy and satisfaction when we finally give in to God’s yearning for us, when we finally start living again, that we find the strength to confront the challenges and the temptations in our lives, ad begin living for others instead of ourselves? That’s resurrection living.

Life is tough, folks, which is why we need God. And especially a God of love, who as a favorite Sufi poet of mine, says “*... is always willing to turn the dung of our lives into flowers.*”

As we celebrate Easter together, I want to encourage each of us – you and me – to remember that faith and hope and love are not virtues that simply show up in some people and not in others, but that they are always choices. Resurrection living is a choice. Resurrection living – the conviction that if we can just choose love over fear, in a hundred small ways each day – that God’s grace will redeem everything that gets in the way of living fully and freely, that God will constantly make of each of us a new creation.

This Easter, and every day that follows, I pray that each of us will choose resurrection, so that we might receive God’s great dream for each one of us – “*... that we might have life, and have it abundantly.*”

“*Alleluia, Christ is Risen!*” (“*The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!*”).