

April 26,2008
The Second Sunday of Easter
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RESURRECTION AS REBELLION

Ever had a time in your life when you've been a bit rebellious? Have you admired the political rebels of our world or in movies? When you tell your friends you go to church, does it ever seem a little rebellious? It probably should, if we're looking to follow, of all people, Jesus of Nazareth, that rebel with a cause.

Jesus rebels against many forces, including in this story, the disciples' (and our own) reason. So a dead man lives and visits his disciples before ascending to heaven? Not reasonable.

No wonder the emotions in today's text include terror, fright, doubt, disbelief. Even in their joy, the disciples were disbelieving. They would sooner believe in ghosts than believe Jesus lives. Let's get the Discovery Channel to do a mythbusters episode here. Life after death? It is unbelievable.

Sometimes it can be easier to believe a word of death and despair than a word of life and hope. It can be easier to believe criticism we receive about ourselves than compliments. It can be easier to believe advertisers who convince us we need to fix our flaws to **look good** and have all the right stuff to have **the good life** than the biblical story that God looked at us humans just as we are and said called us **good**. Cynicism can be easier than optimism.

And yet Jesus invites us to rebel against our disbelief. "Look at my hands and feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see." Jesus is patient with the disciples. He takes the time to guide them through the negative feelings that were weighing them down.

These are the same disciples who not too long ago fell asleep in the garden, abandoned him, even betrayed him to the authorities. So we might expect him to scold, get revenge. Instead he says, "Peace be with you." And then he entrusts them with an important job – to go be witnesses.

It can be so hard to believe that we, of all people, are called to be witnesses to Christ. It can be hard to believe that even if we *were* worthy, that we could make a difference in this world. Like the disciples, we've failed at times to follow Jesus. We too are sinners. Still, the risen Jesus who has known death invites *us* to participate in his ongoing rebellion against death and despair!

One of my favorite U2 songs is "Stuck on a Moment you can't get out of." We've all been stuck in doubt, skepticism at times. Hope and resurrection seem like a distant impossibility. When we face grief, it can seem like we'll never laugh again. When we experience heartbreak, it can seem like we'll never love again. Sometimes the newspapers are so filled with bad news we can't even bear to read it all.

Maybe it isn't until we hear refreshing words of hope that we realize how much hopelessness and cynicism had **dried us out**.

Earlier this week we celebrated a secular holiday that has much to do with practicing resurrection and rebelling against death - Earth day. So too in our life together here, we're in an ongoing communal rebellion of the Christian life. In many ways, you all defy the status quo and reason alone. You make an effort to eat locally, organic, or no meat at all, when the market encourages you to do otherwise. You bike when you could drive. In a fast-paced world of distraction, you take the time to feed the hungry, resettle refugees, work for peace in this city and across the world. You walk through difficult times with one another. We celebrate and remember baptism together – that beautiful ritual that re-hydrates us when we've been **dried out and shriveled up**.

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The disciples' terror reminds us that resurrection can shock us. Wouldn't it be much easier if we could pencil in resurrection into our daily schedules? Lunch meeting, dentist appointment, life changing encounter with the risen Christ, grocery shopping...

It may sound absurd, but Luke reminds us that God really does come to us in our **everyday routine**, in **this world** to be the ringleader in the rebellion against evil and oppression. God comes today. Now. It could happen in church, maybe through the trickling of baptismal waters or in the taste of the wine and bread. It could be on the train. During a conversation with an old friend. Through music, or poetry of this world.

And yet sometimes it seems so more plausible that epic divine adventures occur in ancient Israel, or Middle Earth, or outer space - *any world but this world*. Maybe this is why we're in love with epic stories like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings. There is something so appealing about everyday people, the underdogs, the Cinderellas, suddenly becoming great heroes. They're called upon to participate in a great adventure for the sake of the common good. An eleven year old orphan named **Harry** suddenly receives a letter explaining that in another world, he is the Boy who Lived, the **only one** who can end an evil wizard.

Frodo, a hobbit living the quiet life, is similarly catapulted into an epic adventure against evil. He leaves behind a quaint and comfortable life in the shire for a cause much greater than himself.

Sometimes these fantastical stories can be easier to believe than our own stories as Christians. It's nice to read the books, see the movies – but a little strange to actually **live** it.

Luke's story reminds us that as Christian disciples, we too are part of an adventure. Our thirsty souls live in a hungry world, and we are called to be witnesses, whatever that means. In different ways, we are all called to follow that rebel Jesus. We're called to rebel against the order of this world and work towards the Kingdom of God.

Christian witnesses. Christian rebels. Wendell Berry has some words of advice for us as to how exactly we can enact this awesome responsibility:

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

(Mad Farmer Manifesto)