

Homily – The Petite Resurrection
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As followers of Jesus, you and I are a people of the resurrection. Resurrection, or life after death, is something we hear about at funerals or at Easter. Sometimes we forget every Sunday of the year is a resurrection day in which we celebrate new life.

This wasn't always the case. Two thousand years ago, the early follower of Jesus worshiped on Saturday in the Jewish synagogues with all the rest of the Jews. Over time conflict grew between the followers of Jesus and those who continued with the mainstream Jewish traditions. This caused the early followers of Jesus to shift their worship to Sunday so that Jesus could be included in the worship without bothering the majority who continued to worship on Saturday. While the practical reason to shift was to reduce conflict, the theological rationale was that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. So, it made sense to the early followers of Jesus that they could shift their worship to the resurrection day. And, in this way every Sunday of the year became our observation of the resurrection.

Today, on this Sunday we celebrate resurrection, and we also celebrate and remember the Transfiguration of Jesus. Today is the last Sunday in the Season after Epiphany, the annual season in which we remember how the light of Jesus came into the world. Each year on this last Sunday in the season of light we read the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. This year we have Luke's version of the story.

“Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Eight weeks ago, we began the season of Epiphany with the revealing of Jesus by the star and the three wise men. And, today at the end of the season we have the further revealing of Jesus as his face and body are radiant with light.

Now some scholars wonder if this historical event actually happened after the death and resurrection of Jesus. These scholars wonder if the Gospel writers used a bit of creative license and moved the Transfiguration story from after the resurrection to earlier in the story of Jesus.

We know that the Gospel writers moved other stories around. The four Gospels have many of the same stories in them. But in each Gospel, the stories are not in chronological order. The stories are told in a different order. For example, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus drives out the money changes from the

Temple towards the end of his ministry and shortly before his death. However, in the Gospel of John the story of the money changers happens about three years before the death of Jesus.

It is almost like the Gospel writers had each individual story about Jesus on an index card, and they moved the cards around until they could tell the story of Jesus in a way that made sense to them. Quite possibly, the Gospel writers moved the story of the brightly lit up Jesus from after the resurrection to a point in the Gospel narrative in which they needed to show that something new and wonderful was revealed about Jesus.

Some claim that this type of editing by the Gospel writers proves that the Gospels are false. I don't agree, and it doesn't bother me that the writers may have done some moving around of the index cards. It doesn't bother me that our Sabbath moved from Saturday to Sunday, and it doesn't bother that the Gospel writers may have moved a post-resurrection event to the middle of Jesus's adult ministry. It doesn't bother me but it makes me wonder, what to do with this displaced resurrection story. And, here is what I make of it.

Someday each of us will die and be resurrected. Of this I am confident.

However, during our lifetime each of us will also have many petite deaths, and many petite resurrections. Petite is the French word for little, so each of us has many little deaths and many little resurrections. Two days after Easter I depart for Spain to walk the 500 miles of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. So, I have been studying Spanish. However, I will begin and end my time in Europe in Paris, so a little bit of high school French has been resurrected. So, again Petite is the French word for little, and during our lifetime each of us will have many petite deaths and many petite resurrections.

We have a petite death when an important relationship ends.

We have a petite death when a loved one dies.

We have a petite death when a job or career takes a halt.

Or, finances crumble.

Or, when a serious illness or injury occurs.

Or, when age takes a toll on our minds or bodies.

Or, when violence shatters our perception of safety.

We also have a petite death when we get stuck. We are in a dead end job or relationship. We can't forgive someone, or let go of a wrong that we have done to someone else.

Petite deaths come in many ways. And, curiously, this phenomenon also happens for groups.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
The assassination of President Kennedy.
9-11.

As a society we have a petite death when we have a sudden shift in our view of the world usually because it is not as safe as we had once hoped. So, whether on a personal or a national level, we all have events that I will call petite deaths.

And, our displaced Transfiguration story of Jesus reminds us that each petite death can be followed by a petite resurrection. “and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Now, sometimes after a negative event, we can put it behind us. We can move on. However, petite resurrections are about overcoming a petite death to become something more, something greater, something grander. Petite resurrections happen throughout this lifetime, as we let go of an old way of being. Instead, we grow into a new, more beautiful way of being, a way a being that God has already built into us.

Ken Wilber is an American spiritual writer on transpersonal psychology. And, he teaches that human consciousness exists along a nine-level continuum. This ranges from the archaic consciousness of infants and early Stone Age peoples up to the highest stages of nondual consciousness. I think we could say that Jesus is an example of someone who is at the highest level. He has a full enlightenment and connection to the Christ that is all around us.

Wilber says that in Jesus’ times, most people were at about Stage Three with a “mythic” consciousness. At stage three one’s sense of identity is oriented collectively around membership in a specific tribal group.

Today a greater number of individuals have attained Stage Four, or “rational” consciousness. And, a few have even reached Stage Five, or “vision logic”. Unfortunately, during times of fear or uncertainty, the more primitive group mentality will still quickly reassert itself.

Without going further into the details of this model, my point is to illustrate that God has created greater levels of consciousness into each one of us. We all have unlimited opportunity to become a better version of our selves. And, each petite death is an opportunity for a petite resurrection to help us grow. Each of us has the opportunity to reveal the next stage of being that is already built into us.

This is one of the things that I appreciated about my dad. Throughout his lifetime, he continued to evolve and grow. I have memories about my dad, which revealed that he was once quite racist, sexist, and homophobic. The things he would say about people were quite shocking.

Twenty years ago when I came out to him, my dad was crushed. Eight years later when my sister did the same, my dad arrived at a petite death that was fortunately followed by a petite resurrection. My dad was able to let go of his negative feelings about gays and lesbians and became a strong advocate for justice and gay marriage. His love for his children allowed my dad to be resurrected and then be a role model to others who also needed a resurrection.

But, my dad had some other petite resurrections that were still needed. In the Presbyterian Church all members vote on the call of a new pastor. A few years before his death, my dad was one of two votes against the call of Elizabeth, because he did not want a female pastor. My dad tried to convince his friends to do the same. My dad wanted a male pastor.

In the year before his death, my dad and the female pastor spent a lot of time together so that three months before he died, my dad wanted my mother to call the church office and tell them that he was changing his vote. The personal relationship between my dad and Elizabeth allowed him to see the error of his ways and have another petite resurrection.

Each and every one of us here today, needs petite resurrections in our lives. It may be regarding things that we already know about or areas of our lives in which we have blinders on.

We all have a need for resurrection. Jesus has made resurrection possible for us so that we can all have eternal life. Jesus is also a model to us for the petite resurrections that we need throughout our lifetimes. I pray that you have many petite resurrections, and you grow into your God-given real self.