

## The Dance of the Merrymakers

April 9, 2023

*Based on Jeremiah 31. Resurrection as an Act of Resistance.*

About ten years ago, a man I will call Bob had taken a bad fall and hit his head. He needed surgery and a lengthy recovery period. Given Bob's age and diminishing health, we were worried this might be the beginning of the end.

When I visited Bob in the hospital, he was flat on his back, barely able to move his body, glancing at me as I came in the room out of the corner of his eye. But there was nothing wrong with his mind. Or his mouth! Bob said he was doing just fine, thank you very much, no muss, no fuss, no need for all this attention, go back to something more important, Pastor ...

Instead of leaving, I asked Bob about his life before the hospital bed. As far as I could tell he really *was* doing 'just fine, thank you very much.' But then Bob got quiet and lowered his voice. *You know, Pastor, he said, It's been great to talk to you. But I'm afraid I'm just not into all that religious hocus pocus. I hope you're not offended.* I could tell by his eyes he was genuinely concerned I would feel insulted.

I admit I was taken off guard. But I knew that Bob had a heart of gold. So I blurted out without much thought: *Well ... I guess I won't pray for you, then!*

Thank God, Bob laughed! And I laughed. And he got better. And I got away with a really big lie. Because of course we *did* pray for Bob. Not because we cared so much about all of that religious hocus pocus. But because we cared so much about *Bob*.

Easter Sunday is, of course, religious hocus pocus on steroids, the day on which we proclaim the very thing that may be hardest for people like Bob to believe: an empty tomb, talking angels in the garden, and a living breathing body resuscitated from the dead. Even the Gospels reveal the idea of resurrection is as difficult for ancient people to believe, including the disciples, as it is for us.

The truth is, the proclamation of resurrection has always and will forever belong to the realm of mystery, wonder, and awe. The proclamation of resurrection has always and will forever be about hoping beyond all hope that there is no death so dead that God cannot find life in it. Resurrection is about placing our trust in the steadfast, never-quitting, never-failing, always with us, everlasting divine love that will not ever let us go, no matter what.

This is the kind of love to which the prophet Jeremiah refers when he insists, in the face of the literal destruction of ancient Israel, that the people will not just *survive* warfare, disease, and exile from their homes. They will actually *thrive* on the grace and love, faithfulness and feasting they encounter on the other side of this moment.

*They cut me down, and I leap up high*, says the Lord of the Dance, in the hymn we will sing in just a few moments. *You shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers*, says the prophet Jeremiah in our Lesson today. Shaking your tambourines and your maracas and whatever other merry-making instruments you can rouse up with a week's notice.

There will be a day, Jeremiah insists, there will be a day, Easter Sunday insists, when all that wears you down will fade in the distance, and the sweet sound of angels will welcome you home.

No matter what, Easter Sunday says, in all of its religious hocus pocus, the dance goes on.

As did Bob, who, lo and behold, got better. Then, about a year after his initial injury, a couple of Sundays after Easter, a kind of chaos ensued as the congregation sang "We Are Marching in the Light of God." The choir was singing one verse of the song, the congregation was singing a different verse, and I was on an entirely different page altogether. In the middle of it all the congregation formed an impromptu conga line down the center aisle between the pews, wrapping around to the sides of the sanctuary, dancing to the music.

Unbeknownst to the rest of us, Bob's wife had whispered in Bob's ear: *Do you think you could get your walker out into the aisle and walk down a little ways to the music?* Remember Bob's body had been completely immobile just a year before. But now, one year later, Bob said, *Sure!* Then he stunned us all, as he shook his shoulders and swayed his hips and swished down the aisle, barely touching his walker, with a huge grin on his face.

Proving to all of us once and for all that the resurrection of the body really is real.