

Built into each Gospel's story of Jesus' resurrection is doubt and fear. The specifics vary from story to story-from people fleeing in fear and staying silent, to general mayhem with earthquakes and fiery angels, to what we just heard in Luke. That on the first day of the week, some of the women disciples headed to the tomb to wash off the dirt we had piled on him and cleanse with sweet spices the wounds we inflicted. When they found the tomb empty they freaked out a bit, then the women told the men, who, in a move repeated throughout history, dismissed the women's news as nonsense. Whichever evangelist you listen to there is a theme-we just don't "get" resurrection. Rejection, suffering, and death-these we understand, but resurrection is a real head scratcher and it scares us. What is dead stays dead. And if it comes back to life again it is because it wasn't actually dead in the first place, it just looked like it. Maybe we struggle with resurrection because none of us knows firsthand. We know near death experiences, but none of us has experienced being literally raised from the dead. It isn't something that we can test. And, truth be told, things that are outside our day to day reality *are* a little hard for us to grasp- and we tend not to be much interested in them. But we know death- it is a reality we can see, touch, feel. In fact, we order our lives around death. Our personal physical death, which we spend a lot of time, money, and energy denying, evading,

and avoiding. And we hang onto dead ways of being-driven by fear of changing, of having to let go of an old identity and becoming someone new. Too scared to see what might be on the other side of the stone that seals us in we sit in our dark tombs, saying “well, the devil you know...” as if living in tombs and dwelling with one demon or another is what God dreams for us.

Culturally and politically we prefer to hang onto our empires and kingdoms even when they deal death, shrugging our shoulders and telling ourselves it is just the way it is-completely changing a system just isn't practical-new life isn't going to happen around here, at least not anytime soon. We live in situations individually and collectively that we *know* will never get better.

All of this despite the truth we hear today- he has been raised, the tomb is empty. It seems that surviving resurrection may be harder for us than crucifixion. And yet, the tomb *is* empty. He has gone ahead of us - where he always is- laying down a pathway to new possibilities, new life. God is trumpeting exactly what Jesus had been telling his followers every way he knew how, including living and dying it. That whether we are talking about individual physical death, death to parts of ourselves, or the death of the

unjust empires in which we are complicit and under which we labor, death is not our final destiny or the final word.

Some of you have heard me say before that, often, when people find out I am a priest, one of their first questions for me, if they don't flee frightened I am going to ask them where they are on their walk with Jesus, is about life after death. What happens when we die? What does it look like? And they want details. Many look pretty disappointed when I tell them I don't have a clue. I believe that Jesus Christ was physically raised from the dead and that because he was, despite what our eyes often tell us, all of creation is changed; the river runs backward -- from death to life, from war to peace, from tears to joy. And I trust in the God who loves all Godself created, and who, in Jesus Christ, calls us to life on both sides of the grave. And despite being short on specifics, for me, at least, that really is enough for this life and the next.

In the meantime, it seems to me our call is to know that, despite the fact that each of the Gospels pretty much ends with Jesus' resurrection, resurrection is not the end of Jesus' story and it is the beginning of ours. To live expecting resurrection, the gracious act of the only One who can make life out of dust, not just once, or even just at the end of time, but over and

over again. To believe life is more than we can taste, see, or feel. To remember that God has power beyond anything we can understand or know, that life is stronger than death, and that none of us can ever say for sure that everything is over for us. If God can raise the dead- and if we *believe* God can raise the dead-then despair is always temporary and hope is always invincible. Not because of anything we can say or do but because God always knows how to breathe life into what looks like piles of dust.

None of us knows what resurrection will look like for us in the end-how it will feel or work-nobody but God knows what happened inside that sealed tomb. But we have plenty of evidence that resurrection *is*. It is woven into our daily lives- into the fabric of creation -if we will look we see the pattern of new life through death writ large. Green shoots poking up through what appears to be barren ground. Entire ecosystems growing and thriving on what appear to be dead logs. And instances of new life in human lives.

Maria Andreeva wrote about a wedding she attended in Kharkiv, Ukraine on Tuesday. "The bride, Anastasia, wore a white dress and a veil tucked under a crown of flowers, paired with a leather jacket and knee-high combat boots. The groom, Anton, wore black Levi's and black boots. The couple posed atop the ruins of our hometown, Kharkiv, which has been under near constant bombardment. They kissed and danced to music

playing from a nearby car stereo, in an empty street that would normally be filled with traffic. Luckily, there were no air raid sirens.

Before the war, Anton was a dentist, and Anastasia was a nurse in the oncology unit of a hospital. Since the Russian attacks, they've been running a makeshift pharmacy out of what used to be a hipster coffee shop. Instead of doling out overpriced cappuccinos, Anton and Anastasia are getting medicine like antibiotics and other supplies to elderly and sick Kharkiv residents through a network of volunteers.

They've been working around the clock for weeks. Now it was important for them to get married. None of us had ever seen a wedding like this. It was the best one I've ever been to.

This wedding was for the whole city, and for the whole country.

Anton and Anastasia were a couple full of life and fighting back by simply declaring: Despite all this, we will plan for the future. It was like they were saying to the Russians: You may try to take away our future, but there WILL be one.

Anton and Anastasia have no plans to go on a honeymoon anytime soon. One day, they want to go somewhere with a beach and palm trees.

Before that happens, there is a war to win, and brutal days ahead. But yesterday, there was hope, and beauty, and love inside the ugliness."

I know this story is not a physical resurrection story, because that is something only God really knows. But I do know it is one of the many stories of the raising of the dead. People who have been brought so low by all rights should just lie there, but suddenly they sit up, brush off the ashes, and go on to live more than they ever lived before.

It scares us. New life is just so unpredictable. But resurrection is not the end of any story, it is an invitation-one into which Phoebe Ruth and Vivian are now invited to live in and into-and it is how God works-not protecting us from death but bringing us back to life, because life is always God's will for us. Those who believe it live in a hope that shall never die.