

Resurrection!

John Dear | Apr. 10, 2007 | On the Road to Peace

A few years ago, Daniel Berrigan and I celebrated Easter in a New York park with a few Jesuit friends. We held a small liturgy and a picnic. After reading a Gospel account of the resurrection, we sat a few moments in silence. Then I said, "I'm amazed Jesus came back at all. He had been betrayed, denied, abandoned, arrested, jailed, tortured and executed, and yet he came back peaceably, forgiving everyone generously, punishing no one. He didn't get angry at them -- he proceeded to make them breakfast!"

"Part of me thinks," I added, "if it were me, I wouldn't have wanted to come back at all. I would have been angry, hurt, and resentful. I would have wanted nothing to do with those former friends. I'd have nursed a grudge for a few thousand years before I came back!"

Dan smiled and said quietly, "Jesus didn't have a mean bone in his body."

Exactly. Jesus keeps on making peace, without any trace of resentment, anger, or bitterness. He forgives us, gives us his peace, and invites us again to join his life of love, nonviolence, and compassion. Amazing.

That's what my heart hears when I think of resurrection. I hear a summons to carry on the work for justice and peace, and to do so with as much love as I can muster. I hear a call to forgive, offer compassion, be nonviolent, resist injustice, and live life to the full.

Resurrection brings more than new clothes or Easter baskets. It means peace is stronger than war, justice stronger than injustice, compassion than contempt. Resurrection means forgiveness surpasses resentment and reconciliation revenge. It means nonviolence wins out over violence -- all contrary to the standards of conventional wisdom. In Dan's words, resurrection represents "the slight edge of life over death." Or as Dr. King put it, "truth crushed to earth shall rise again."

Resurrection -- the vindication of nonviolence over violence -- amid our bloody history proves that active nonviolence, steadfast service, and public peacemaking are the will of God. Note too that the resurrection is illegal. Jesus committed civil disobedience when he rose from the dead. The Roman soldiers guarded the tomb to make sure he stayed dead, but once again, Jesus breaks the imperial laws of death.

The nonviolent Jesus has risen above injustice, poverty, and violence. He is risen despite war. Executed himself, he is risen from the death penalty. Christ is risen beyond the power of nuclear weapons, racism, sexism,

starvation, global warming and violence itself. Christ is risen above the culture of death. A bold announcement -- and we're called to prove it. We prove it with the boldness of our own lives, our faith, our nonviolent resistance to the forces of death.

Which is to say, we must share the peacemaking life of the risen Jesus. We must confront death and its metaphors. For we, too, are headed for resurrection -- our survival is already guaranteed. We're free to live beyond the culture of death. We're free to reject violence and poverty and war. We're free to confront ROTC, Los Alamos, and the Pentagon. We're free to dismantle nuclear weapons.

We prove we're a resurrection people by putting down our swords and beating them into plowshares. By loving our enemies. By carrying on Jesus' work of nonviolent resistance against systemic injustice. By speaking out against the insane U.S. war on Iraq. And by persisting despite the obstacles, the opposition, and the apparent futility, knowing that the outcome, in God's hands, is assured.

"I shall die, but that is all I shall do for death," the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote long ago. Here is a clue about withholding our cooperation from death. We're free to live life to the full now, knowing that eternal life has already begun. We're free to resist the forces of death, renounce fear, and refuse to give in to despair.

"Life is on our side," Thomas Merton wrote to the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz in 1959. "The silence and the cross of which we know are forces that cannot be defeated. In silence and suffering, in the heartbreaking effort to be honest in the midst of dishonesty (most of all our own dishonesty), in all these is victory. It is Christ in us who drives us through darkness to a light of which we have no conception and which can only be found by passing through apparent despair. Everything has to be tested. All relationships have to be tried. All loyalties have to pass through fire. Much has to be lost. Much in us has to be killed, even much that is best in us. But Victory is certain. The resurrection is the only light."

And so despite these grim times, I remain hopeful. With my friends, I keep an eye on the long haul view of things, into resurrection, salvation, and eternity. I trust that with the God of peace, all that I hope for is possible. And as Dan taught me long ago, the best way to be hopeful is by doing hopeful things.

This week, April 12, I stand trial in Federal Court in Albuquerque, N.M., for daring to see my senator to ask him to end the war on Iraq. I trust that more and more people will rise up and speak out and one day this war will end, that as we share the cross of nonviolent resistance we will taste the resurrection in its concrete manifestations as signs of God's reign breaking through into a new culture of peace. I go to court filled with hope, not in America or the unjust judicial system or our evil warmaking, but in the risen Jesus, who greets each one of us with astonishing words: "Peace be with you."

I think he means it. Alleluia!

John Dear's latest book, *Transfiguration* (from Doubleday, with a foreword by Archbishop Tutu) is available from local bookstores and

[Amazon.com](#) [1]. He will also offer a week of classes on the Gospel of Jesus at the historic Ghost Ranch conference center in Abiquiu, N.M. (where artist Georgia O'Keefe lived) from June 17-24. For information contact,

www.ghostranch.org [2]

and www.johndear.org [3].

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