

Sunday Morning Reflection

April 12, 2020 – Easter Sunday

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Show us your resurrection power and love

Scripture Passage – [John 20:1-18](#), [Acts 10:34-43](#)

Throughout Jesus' ministry he showed his disciples many examples of his power and love. When Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of darkness, Jesus declared his power over darkness and his love for all people. When Jesus shared living water with the woman at the well who had been abused by a patriarchal society, Jesus revealed his power over abusive societal practices, and his love for victims. When Jesus healed the man born blind, Jesus revealed his power over blindness of any sort, and his love for people who are blind, physically and otherwise. And when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead on the fourth day, when all hope had been lost, Jesus showed us his power over death, and his love of life. Throughout Jesus' ministry he continued to show his disciples his power and love.

But perhaps, nowhere is Jesus' power and love seen more clearly than in his death and resurrection. As a matter of fact, all acts of power and love Jesus showed in the gospels should be read through the lenses of his death and resurrection. Thus, making every act of power over sin or death or disease or injustice, an act of Jesus' resurrection power.

Paul, in his writings, highlights two ways that Jesus' death and resurrection power and love transform human existence. In the first place, Paul emphasized that we should understand the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection as the primary mediums that bring about conversion or redemption or transformation in our lives. In Colossians, Paul teaches that we can appropriate for ourselves the transforming death and resurrection power and love of Jesus, by focusing the entirety of our hearts and minds, our selves, on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul teaches that in a deeply personal and corporate and spiritual manner, we die with Christ and

we rise with Christ. Going into greater detail, Paul suggests later in Colossians 3 that dying with Christ and rising with Christ is not facilitated through some trite, reductionistic prayer, but is rather a lifelong process of dying with Christ by putting to death all the vices in our lives that are contrary to the person of Jesus. Paul said in verse 5, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." In verse 8 Paul continued, "rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." To be born again, to be saved, to be redeemed and transformed begins first and foremost with a putting to death and a ridding ourselves of the vices that are contrary to who Jesus was and who Jesus wants us to be. There is no salvation without dying with Christ.

But the spiritual life of transformation, that Paul believes we are recreated for through Jesus' death and resurrection power and love, is not just about these more negative tasks of putting to death and ridding ourselves of vices, Paul also appeals to the resurrection when he calls on believers to be people who clothe themselves or put on the virtues that reflect Jesus' character. Paul said, beginning in verse 12: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." And so what Paul is calling us to do, in addition to dying with Christ, is to also rise with Christ by putting on the virtues of Jesus.

I love the fact that Paul used the present tense of the verb to emphasize that this reality of spiritually dying with Christ and rising with Christ is an ongoing, day in and day out, process. Paul takes Jesus' death and resurrection, and makes these twin pillars of Jesus' presence on earth, not just about a past event some 2000 years ago. Rather, in a deeply spiritual manner Paul takes the twin pillars of Jesus' presence on earth, his death and resurrection, and highlights their power and love to transform our lives today. The death and resurrection of Jesus in a deeply spiritual manner, symbolically define our spiritual life in Jesus today, as we put to death all this is contrary to Jesus and clothe ourselves in all that is consistent with Jesus. There is no cheap grace in Paul. There is no shallow accepting the

fruits of Jesus' death and resurrection power and love, while ignoring the discipleship that Jesus' death and resurrection power and love shaped.

Now in addition to the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection reshaping who each and every one of us is as people, the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection also reshaped the very nature of social relationships in the first century. In the first century, as I have noted before, people lived in social boxes on what could be described as a social ladder. For the most part, the box that you were born in was the box that you were confined to for the rest of your life. And you did not marry or even socialize outside your box. These boxes were rigidly defined by class, nationality, gender, race, and religion. And for the Jews, all Gentiles were unclean heathen who would one day suffer God's judgment. Jews would not associate with Gentiles, especially Samaritans. These boxes allowed people to discriminate against one another and perhaps, most sadly, these boxes allowed people to hate everyone who was not a part of their box. But in and through his death and resurrection power and love, Jesus aimed to put to death (the cross) the racism, sexism, nationalism, and classism hate and bigotry that defined people's lives and worlds, and raise up (the resurrection) a new community that would be defined by his power and love.

Peter experiences first hand this very reality when the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 tells Peter to go to Cornelius' house and witness to him. Peter knows, that according to his understanding of Jewish social boxes, this is wrong. Peter's associates know it is wrong. Cornelius knows it is wrong. Cornelius' servants know it is wrong. Everyone seems to know this is all bad form and wrong, except for the Spirit who acts in the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Peter, well to his credit, as someone who has been working through the process of putting to death the old and putting on the new, well he steps across the threshold of Cornelius' home and enters into his house. And my oh my, do we witness the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection take hold of that moment as Cornelius and everyone in his house is saved.

As people who are born anew, redeemed, recreated, transformed in and through the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are called to be people who put to death all the old ways of racism, sexism, nationalism, classism and even religious bigotry. We are called to put those old ways of socially justified hate to death, and to clothe ourselves in

the inclusive love of Christ. We have been recreated through the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection to be a community that is free of boxes; neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female; and a community who shares the good news of God's love with all people.

I read many articles this week, but two that really hit me were one from Sojourners magazine and another from Reuters. Both articles were analyzing the use of hate speech on line, in print, in social media, and on the airwaves. What they documented was disturbing. There has been a significant rise in violence toward Chinese people in the United States. Some being physically attacked and accused of causing the "#Kungflu". Tension between generations, specifically millennials and baby boomers is mounting. Millennials, in a number of forums, have referred to the COVID19 virus as "#BoomerRemover" and boomers have referred to millennials as "#CoronaPartyMorons". These racial and generational divisions in many regards are the least worrisome.

Christian theologians and secular sociologists are beginning to point out how the corona virus is fanning the flames of deep-seated resentment and hatred between classes and races in the United States. As many white-collar workers continue to receive a salary while working from home, more and more blue-collar workers are losing their jobs, apartments, cars, and hope. In response to this disparity, many who have lost their jobs are lashing out at those who have not. Case in point: A mother who is a CPA recently posted on some social media platform her frustration with having to do her work from home, while her husband, a lawyer, also did his work from home while also trying to keep their kids up to speed on their homework and keeping their kids from killing one another. Now honestly, I can empathize with her. I can't imagine what this situation would be like if Zachary, Nicholas, and Christopher were all in Junior High and grade school. But even though I can empathize, I can also understand why her post went viral with many angry people pointing out that she and her husband still have jobs, still have a home, have plenty to eat and are able to socially isolate themselves and be safe and well. Other people pointed out that they had lost their jobs and had no money to get food. Some pointed out that they may have been the person who became exposed so that she and her family could have essential services. My point is not that either class is right or wrong. My point is that the COVID19 pandemic is beginning to exacerbate the divisions that exist in our culture. Racial and social boxes are becoming more defined because of the virus, and the

mistrust and hatred between such groups is on the rise. My question, therefore, is how are we going to encourage the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection to speak to our new reality? How are we going to be a people who rather than reflecting our class or race rights, boldly act in ways that share the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection? The Spirit called Peter to shatter the barriers that separated him from Cornelius so that the power and love of Jesus death and resurrection could pour into Cornelius' world. What barriers that separate people that are being exposed by COVID19, is the Spirit calling us shatter with the power and love of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Close with response activity focused on letter from Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan.