

Easter 2023

Happy Feast of the Resurrection!

Today we celebrate what we might call the fundamental outlook of our religion—
resurrection.

We believe in second chances, in forgiveness, in renewal of life, in an unbreakable
relationship with God who is love.

As Paul reminds the Romans, nothing can separate us from the love of God—nothing
we have done or thought, nothing others can do, nothing.

We may forget, become lost (yet learn a lot along the way), but then . . . resurrection.

Some people even seek to make us doubt.

Why would they do this?

Because it gives them power.

Remember that third temptation Jesus rejected in the wilderness, power over all the
world?

Along with *selfishness* and *pride*, it is one of the three primary temptations that underlie
all other temptations.

Power—if people can get us by the amygdala, as my friend, Will, frequently says, they
can control us.

(The amygdala is the part of the brain that processes fear.)

Politicians, news outlets, even advertisers regularly seek to grab us by the amygdalae. It is not a new approach, but mass media makes this tactic even easier, more effective. Others' control over us is greatly lessened when we recognize what we are allowing them to do to us.

We are turning our freedom over to them.

We read an article in the paper about what some politician has done and lose our grounding, lose the peace in our hearts.

We are forgetting resurrection, that there is *always* hope.

Even theologians have given in to the temptation of power.

They have created theologies that, rather than lead us to the all-embracing love of God, keep us enthralled to *them*.

Such theologies are not a part of our Anglican tradition, but they seep in, nonetheless.

A common example of this theology is that God loves you, *but* is sending you to hell for eternity if you do not say the right words.

There is a sign on a utility pole by highway 17: "Say this: Jesus forgive me and save me from my sins."

Think with me about this.

It is not that I disagree with confession or with the sentiment that the love of Christ saves us.

It is with the *idea* that *merely* saying this has some sort of magical effect that I take issue.

Keep in mind, also, that eternity is not just a trillion trillion years, not just a googolplex years.

(This is, by some accounts, the highest named number; it is 1 followed by a googol zeros, and a googol is one followed by a 100 zeros.

For scale, it is estimated that there are not a googol atoms on the entire planet.

Imagine 1 followed by a googol zeros.)

Yet, not even a googolplex years, but forever where you will never ever stop enduring the most excruciating suffering you have ever experienced.

So, there is nothing that can separate us from God's love, but God's willingness to forgive has an expiration date?

You messed up, in other words, and so did I, but I said the magic words and you did not.

I believe that confessing is a profound and meaningful experience, if we *mean* it, but I do not believe that there are magic words that save us.

Love saves us, or, more exactly, opening our hearts to love, which is God.

I am not done yet, though.

It gets worse.

People are taught that these magic words work because Jesus paid the price.

So now God is charging a price to love us?

I have to tell you, if you have to pay for “love,” well, there is a word for that, and it in no way honors our loving LORD and creator.

If taken seriously, this fear-based theology has two consequences.

It makes us do what the person warning us tells us we should do in order to avoid torture in hell.

That is, they determine how we behave.

Don't drink wine.

Don't dance.

Whatever will keep you in their thrall, which has nothing to do with love.

Secondly, and this is even more damaging, it sets us up to see others in black and white terms.

Either they are saved or not.

They are either like us or disappointments soon to be tortured by God.

Yet somehow we are supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves, all the while seeing them as fundamentally different from ourselves.

This theology, you see, **sets us up to fail** so that we then must keep returning to the source of this so-called wisdom for reassurance.

We end up drowning in guilt for failing so consistently to love our neighbors as ourselves because we have adopted a theology that makes failure inevitable.

How can we, instead, live a resurrection life, a life worthy of our loving God?

Well, I would like to share with you the theology that works for me.

It is consonant with the Episcopal tradition, but not everyone shares it.

If you disagree with it, that is fine.

We are Episcopalians.

We continue to love one another and pray together despite disagreement.

For me, adopting universalism freed me from the aforementioned doom loop.

Universalism is the belief that everyone came from God and, eventually, everyone will
return to God.

Now “eventually” may be a long time, maybe even a googol years.

I have no idea, but personally I feel confident that God made no throw-away souls.

When I see my brothers and sisters all as being on a journey towards God, with some
moving faster than others, it relieves the temptation to judge.

We start to understand that everyone is trying out various manners of relating, of being
in the world, in order to avoid all risk of suffering, to make everything be all right.

There is no such path, but we try, anyway, don't we.

Suffering is unavoidable, but it is also an opportunity for us to love.

It is easier to look with compassion on someone who is attempting, however ineptly, to protect herself from harm than it is to look with compassion on someone whom we see as evil, soon to be condemned for eternity by the Creator.

Universalist theology is, moreover, in keeping with the assertion that God is love—not that God *can be loving*—that is different—but that God *is* love, which is what the gospel tells us.

We then readily come to the conclusion that all is working out as God intended.

God made no mistakes that had to be rectified by sadistically torturing God's son to extract some sort of cosmic payment.

When we cast off any notion that God could commit an unloving act, we ourselves love more easily.

When we think, that we are here not to be tested and tricked by a fickle God, but to learn and to grow, we more readily trust God.

I think many people prefer the unloving version of God because it justifies their own lack of love.

When I assume, on the other hand, that the very fact that I am *here* means that *I* have something to learn, it is easier to maintain humility with respect to my brothers and sisters.

It is easier, in other words, to live a resurrection life.

Happy Easter!