

UPRISING
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Just in time for Holy Week, this past Monday a Christian militia group in Michigan made headlines. Way to go, guys! We wouldn't want Muslims to get all the credit for terrorism, now would we?!

Come to think of it there's a precedent for Christian militias. It's called the Crusades. Yeah, boy, that sure showed the world what Christians were made of as crusaders massacred thousands of Jews on the way to kill Muslims in the Holy Land. Nor should we forget the brutal colonization of Africa and the Americas by so called Christian nations.

There's a clear precedent for Christian militias.

Looking on the bright side, the arrest of this Christian militia should help us realize that not everything called Christian is Christian. And furthermore, if there's more to Christianity than those crazed zealots in Michigan then certainly we can appreciate that there's more to Islam than terrorists in Yemen. Maybe this will bring some humility to Christian arrogance and some sense to Western ignorance about Islam.

In case you hadn't heard, that Christian militia group planned to kill policemen with the hopes of provoking an uprising against the government. Yeah, right. That's what Jesus really wanted! Let's see what Bible were they reading?

As it turns out, they were reading the same one we read except they missed the part about loving your enemies even if it kills you. They didn't, however, miss the part where God is said to have ordered the slaughter of entire villages including women and children in order to carve out a safe haven for God's chosen people in Palestine. That Michigan group isn't the first to admire and embrace that kind of God.

But they did miss the part in the Bible that says God is love. They also missed the part about clothing the naked, protecting the weak, healing the sick and feeding the hungry as the way of Christ.

Not everything called Christian is Christian. The church still conspires with the world to crucify the innocent in a thousand different ways, in a thousand different places while we stand at a safe distance washing our hands of complicity.

The myth of inevitable progress turns out to be just that: a myth. The 20th century turned out to be the most violent and bloody on record. Just when we thought religious wars had killed a lot of people along came three officially atheistic, non-religious regimes in Russia, China and Cambodia that slaughtered more people than all religious wars combined. I have atheist and non-religious friends. I try not to hold that horrifying, bloody record of wars in the name of "no-god" against them.

Whether war is fought in the name of God, or in the name of the "brotherhood of man," or in the name of "freedom and democracy," it's enough to make you give up and quit. For cryin' out loud, it's been 20 centuries since Jesus taught the way of love!

Now this may sound awfully grim for Easter Sunday and it is. But remember there's a reason the cross hangs in this arch (behind me) and not a giant "happy face." You can't get to Easter Sunday without going through Good Friday and Black Saturday. Nor can you get to a transformed self until your self-centered, power hungry self dies. Our old self must die daily in order to be reborn in the likeness of Christ, the Beloved. We must be born again.

In one way of seeing things it sure seems that the way of Christ is dead and buried. I feel that way at times, as do many of you. And so we trudge to church to pay our last respects. And then something happens.

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. (Luke 24:1-12)

The world, as it turns out, is not what we often think. There's more than meets the eye. There's a mystery at the heart of reality we can never quite comprehend. It's true of what we call "creation"; it's also true of what we call "Resurrection." How can the cosmos arise out of nothing? How can a new world arise out of an empty tomb? You can analyze it to death or bow in awe.

The tomb is empty. Death is not the final word. There's an opening in the world and it bears the shape of the One who spent his life loving others in small ways.

Keep your eyes and heart open. Something with the heart and soul of the Beloved is arising on this planet and it's far greater than anything called church or Christianity. As Clarence Jordon put it: "The proof of the Resurrection is not the empty tomb; it's the spirit filled community."

If truth be told, it's likely Jesus was not so well known or significant in his time as the gospel stories portend and portray. It's likely he was considered irrelevant in the face of Rome's crushing occupation and brutal treatment of his people. His way of saving the world by loving god-forsaken people was considered silly by his contemporaries who thought only violence could save the world from violence.

The cross is an emphatic rejection of that perverse notion. I know, I know, much of Christianity has seen the crucifixion as a divinely approved act of violence. But not everything called Christian is Christian. The cross is an emphatic rejection of the perverse notion that violence will redeem the world. When will we ever learn?

It's likely Jesus was a minor figure in his time and place. Only later, looking back and remembering, would something dawn in the hearts of his disciples. Only later would they see in Jesus' way of living a power far greater than what any empire could throw at them. A power greater than death! When they got around to telling and writing the story of Jesus they "told it big" because in him they had discovered a power greater than any other. The power of love.

They awoke from their slumbers and joined the uprising of love, the uprising of people armed with nothing but truth and love, an uprising of people who resist evil non-violently, an uprising to build a community of the Beloved that knows no borders or boundaries, an uprising of people that keeps on in the face of threats and ridicule, that keeps on even when the world deems them irrelevant, that keeps on even when all hope seems gone.

This is the way I am going to live and walk, says Jesus. Anyone want to join me? It's OK if you can't or won't. It's an invitation. But I'd sure like company.

The Resurrection of Jesus, which is to say, the Resurrection of the way of love against all odds, has never convinced a skeptic but it has never failed to inspire and empower those who have answered the invitation of Christ to practice true communion with God and true community with others no matter what it costs.

There's a blood red circle
On the cold dark ground
And the rain is falling down
The church door's thrown open
I can hear the organ's song
But the congregation's gone
My city of ruins
Come on, rise up! Come on, rise up!

There's tears on the pillow
Darlin' where we slept
You took my heart when you left
Without your sweet kiss
My soul is lost, my friend
Tell me how do I begin again?
My city's in ruins

Now with these hands,
I pray Lord
With these hands,
I pray for the strength, Lord
I pray for the faith, Lord
We pray for your love, Lord
We pray for the lost, Lord
We pray for this world, Lord
Come on
Come on
Come on, rise up

(lyrics by Bruce Springsteen)