

**BLINDING LIGHT**  
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The Polish people have been on my mind this week. As you know a plane carrying the Polish president and nearly one hundred other government officials and dignitaries crashed on Russia soil not far from the Katyn Forest where 70 years earlier Soviet secret police execute 22,000 Poles (including 8,000 prisoners of war) in cold blood and dumped their bodies in mass graves. Needless to say, that heinous crime fueled rage and festering resentment against Russians. The president of Poland was on his way to commemorate that horrific event with the Russian president as a major step toward forgiveness and reconciliation between their nations.

The Serbs have been on my mind as well. I've been reading Mark Danner's *Stripping the Body Bare: Politics, Violence, War*. It recounts the Balkan Wars of the 1990s fueled by deep resentment for the massacre of Serbians by the Ottoman Turks in the 14th century. Serb nationalism festered for 600 years then suddenly erupted with fierce and blood curdling vengeance against Bosnian Muslims in an effort to cleanse the Serb Holy Land of "sub humans." In fact, the Croatians, Albanians and Bosnians all had their own sense of victimization, what Danner calls "competitive victimization." Who has the greatest right to retaliate and how many thousands must we kill to make things right?

Resentments and victimization of this sort are nearly universal. When will peoples and nations ever find a new way forward? Today's lessons offer a few clues, some possibilities.

*He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (Acts. 9:4-5)*

*When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. (John 21:9-11)*

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As a child I held several misconceptions of the Resurrection, which are held by many Christians today. After all, first impressions are lasting impressions. One misconception was the notion that the Resurrection of Jesus was *infallible proof* of life after death. The Resurrection is about life after death but not in the way I thought as a child.

Little did I know then that for thousands of years before Jesus people were strong believers in life after death and that most people even now believe in the afterlife with or without the Resurrection as proof. The Resurrection is proof of something else and, as it turns out, it's more of a *clue* than a proof, the way creation itself *hints* at a Creator without offering solid proof. You need eyes to see that more is there than meets the eye.

The Resurrection isn't so much about God raising our bodies from the earth or sea in the future; but rather raising us up now. The Resurrection story is something like the story of humans rising out the animal world. Humanity arose on this planet with many traits common with animals but also with certain distinguishing traits not found in animals, primarily an insatiable thirst for knowledge plus divine like powers to create and destroy.

The "Body" or new life form arising out of the darkness of the tomb is characterized by

divine like compassion and forgiveness. It manifests itself in multiple times and places under various names (or no name), especially in courageous, non-violent efforts toward peace, justice and reconciliation, often against strong opposition not unlike the opposition Jesus encountered from the religious, economic and political powers of his day. And it's not just about reconciliation in the world at large but the world at small, your world of people and relationships.

In the wake of Christ death a body arose which can be glimpsed but not comprehended. It's beyond ordinary senses. It's revealed more than discovered. In all the Resurrection gospel scenes, Jesus, who stands as the symbol of this new life form, is not immediately recognized. You can't quite see all that's there before your eyes.

By the way, resurrection should not be confused with resuscitation. That's the story of Lazarus; not the story of Jesus. The Resurrection is more like Creation.

Scientists tell an incredible story of the cosmos, a story ongoing for nearly 14 billion years. And then there's the 4.5 billion year old biological evolutionary story on this single planet. We know enough to know we don't know much. Still, we can see, if not purpose in the cosmos and on the earth, at least patterns and direction.

From the initial Big Bang the cosmos and planetary life seems to be unfolding toward more and more diversity, complexity, and inclusiveness, as if the entire cosmos had a longing for community and love. It would prompt one of the New Testaments poets to exclaim that Christ, which is to say Love, is in all, through all, above and beneath all things.

In his day, Jesus drew his companions into a new realm of possibilities, full of amazing potential. It was a possibility glimpsed, according to our wisdom tradition, 2000 years before Jesus by Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12), when they left their kindred, tribe and culture behind to journey toward a promise, a journey both geographic and spiritual.

That promise represented a leap forward in human brain development and consciousness, a step away from millennia of tribalism and survivalism, of violent revenge and endless retaliation that defined peoples and nations, (and sadly still does); and a step toward the possibility of blessing all families, tribes and nations. At a moment in time ancient Israel grasped the possibility of one God and one human family but could not hold on to it. As the Old Testament shows, biological and cultural momentum were too powerful for them to overcome tribalism and violence, although some treasured the promise and gave voice to it against great odds.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, treasured that ancient promise in her heart and weaned her son on it. He would embody it fully. It was a breath of fresh air, the breath of the Holy Spirit. Over time it would indwell and enrapture ordinary humans into a new way of relating to God, strangers, aliens, adversaries, and even enemies.

Not overnight but in eventually "Jesus" was enraptured into human consciousness and imagination and like a seed buried in the ground it rose and flowered. "Jesus," in our tradition, stands as an icon for this new community as "Adam" stands as the icon of the old humanity. To be "in Christ" (a phrase the Apostle Paul uses repeatedly) is to be "in" this new community.

When certain first century Jews got around to telling what they experienced in and with Jesus, they drew on language and images from the Genesis creation story. You see it in the gospels. Light out of the darkness of crucifixion. (Remember the three hours of darkness at the crucifixion?) Life out of a tomb on the "first day of the week." Jesus walking in a garden. Jesus breathing into his disciples as God had breathed life into a spiritless earthling named Adam. Out of the death of Jesus something new was created.

Which brings us to the lessons for this third Sunday of Easter. In the first lesson (Acts), Saul—who would later be called Paul—was out to crush the fledgling Jesus movement. Saul was a flaming nationalist and wanted to preserve the ethnic purity of his people, not unlike some Serbs who fomented the Balkan wars and not unlike certain American militia groups who want to resurrect a former, more homogenous America. That's an old and continuing story.

First century Jews anticipated a Resurrection, not of individuals but rather of their crushed and demoralized nation, a nation restored to prominence led a warrior king like David. But on Easter Sunday the world got an upstart community of a radically different sort, a community that would transcend race, ethnicity and nationality. It's not what Saul or most of his people expected or wanted. After all, they like the Serbs and many other nations thrived on resentment and victimization.

So when a group of Saul's fellow compatriots began mixing and eating with other ethnic groups in the name of Jesus, Saul went on a rampage to arrest and kill those radicals along with their misguided social experiment. On the road to Damascus where some of the radicals had assembled, Saul was suddenly blinded by a flash of light. And, as he would later tell it, Jesus spoke to him, telling him that by persecuting this new community he was persecuting Jesus.

Isn't that interesting? Jesus and the new community are one and the same. In other words, twenty some years after his crucifixion, Jesus is no long a singular individual. Go figure.

After that blinding light, it took Saul nearly three years of study and reflection to get it, to get it into his mind and heart. But when he finally did he became an ardent apostle of universal reconciliation. In the death of Jesus he saw the potential and power of bringing reconciliation to alienated peoples. So he would say, over and over: in Christ, which is to say, in the new community there is no longer Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or master. We are all one family, one community.

The gospel lesson (John 21) is about Peter who in despair over missing his friend and master, over despair with the same old vicious world went fishing with his buddies. At daybreak, after a long and futile night, they saw a stranger grilling fish on the beach. The stranger called out. Have you caught any fish? Not a one, they said. Cast your net in another direction, the stranger said. They did. The nets nearly burst.

What is that all about? Well, it looks like a parable, a parable with the mysterious figure and voice of Jesus at the center, a voice we can still hear if we listen.

As the story goes, the fish count in the bursting nets was 153, a rather odd number even for the Bible. What could that number mean? One guess is that 153 was the number of nations or different peoples thought to be in world at that time. So, what could it mean that all had found their way into Peter's net, Peter that cranky racist who at one time refused to enter the house of a non-Jew?

What do these stories suggest? Perhaps this: the way of Jesus will not die. It is the truth and the life. This way leads us into the future. And like all other evolutionary phases on this planet, it takes time to fully manifest. It emerges in fits and starts. But this we know: it multiplies and thrives on love freely offered and gratefully received.