

EASTER MESSAGE: EMBRACE THE POWER!

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, April 20, 2025

A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to a Sunday sermon. So four worms were placed in four separate containers. The first worm was put in a container of alcohol. The second worm was put in a container of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put in a container of chocolate syrup. And the fourth worm was put in a container of good, clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the minister reported the following results. The first worm in alcohol: dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke: dead. The third worm in chocolate syrup: dead. The fourth worm in good soil: alive. And so the pastor asked the congregation, "What did you learn from this demonstration?"

A young woman in the back raised her hand and said, "Pastor, what I learned from this demonstration is, if you drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and eat chocolate, you'll never have worms." [Congregants laugh]

So, I was hoping that joke brought a smile to your face. But even if it didn't, what should bring a smile to all of our faces is Easter. Isn't Easter one of the most joyful, happy seasons of the year? It's one of the most inspiring times as nature comes alive again. Everything's green and lush. The plants and flowers -- they're blooming; they're blossoming, and it's absolutely gorgeous and inspiring. Not to mention the highlight of Easter, which is the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You can truly say that Easter is a time of reawakening; a time of rebirth, a time of renewal.

You know, Jesus said, *"In this life, there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."* You know, when you think about it, Jesus overcame the very worst of human experiences: betrayal; hate; injustice; fear; torture; and death.

Traditionally, the resurrection is seen as the prophecy being fulfilled: that the Messiah -- through his atoning sacrifice -- would give his life and, by his blood, we'd be washed of our sins that we may have eternal life. In Unity we don't see the resurrection as a future promise or a passport to eternal life, but a demonstration of the indestructible, invincible power of God.

Easter is not just a reminder of something that happened more than 2,000 years ago; it is a reminder that that resurrecting power is alive and available to all of us today.

Most people think there was only one resurrection, and that was Jesus on Easter Sunday. But the resurrecting power has always existed. The transforming power of God has always been present and available. You know, Elijah, Elisha, Peter, Paul, and Jesus all raised people from the dead. We are told that tombs opened and many bodies of saints rose.

And these were not the only times that this resurrecting principle was alive and demonstrated. In fact, you could say Jesus' entire ministry was about teaching the overcoming, restorative, resurrecting power of God. In his raising Lazarus; in healing a hemorrhaging woman, who had been debilitated for 12 years. That was a resurrection story. The prodigal son who squandered everything and then came to himself and went back to the father. That was a resurrection story. Even his father said, *"My son who was dead is now alive."* The story of the loaves and fishes is a resurrecting story: out of lack into a story of abundance and having more than enough.

Paul -- the Apostle Paul -- on his conversion on the road to Damascus was blinded; transformed from being angry and hateful to being positive and passionate in preaching the Gospel. You know, the resurrection of Jesus is really just an expansion and a full demonstration of that principle and that

indestructible power of God that makes all things possible. And that principle applies in all areas of our lives!

Dr. Norman Vincent Peal, who wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking*, said, "When you lose your eagerness; when you lose your ability to feel; when you no longer dream dreams or see a vision for yourself; when your life has become dull and lifeless, something has died in you and it needs resurrection."

Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, for I've overcome the world." And he said, "He who believes in me shall do the works that I do and even greater things than these." How could he say that unless that Spirit and that power of resurrection lives and dwells in us?

But it's amazing: even though he said that, we still doubt ourselves. He said that, and yet we still doubt our spiritual power. We doubt our goodness; we doubt our greatness; and we doubt our God-given abilities to rise above and transform our lives.

How many people have ever had something that you're struggling with – or currently have something you're struggling with -- that you would like to resurrect and bring forth a greater experience? Anybody? Okay; great. About five of us. That's perfect! [Congregants laugh]

You know, Easter's really a reminder that we have this power to overcome within us. You know, to help us remember that we're children of God; we're powerful spiritual beings; and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

"As a child of God, I am a powerful spiritual being."

Together: [with congregants] *"As a child of God, I am a powerful spiritual being."*

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Together: [with congregants] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

And even when we have this power, life isn't easy. Even when we have this power, transforming and changing and improving our lives is not easy. Success is not easy. You know, relationships are not easy. That, even when we have this power, it takes work and it takes courage to bring forth this resurrecting power in our lives.

And this morning we're going to look at four ways that Jesus set an example for us in how to have courage to embrace and bring forth this spiritual power: this resurrecting power in us.

The first thing he taught was the importance of **HAVING COURAGE TO STEP INTO YOUR JERUSALEM.** How many people ever had something important to do that was really difficult and scared you? And you avoided it as much as you could? Anybody ever avoid? I mean we have so many things in our lives that are important, that are helpful, that are vital for our success and our fulfillment and our happiness. And we don't want to face them. We don't want to deal with them because they're hard.

Sometimes it comes in the form of an uncomfortable conversation with someone that we need to have. Sometimes it comes in the form of a tough decision we need to make or a painful family issue we need to address. Sometimes it's getting to a place of being honest to ourselves that we need help or sometimes honest to ourselves to say, *"I can't keep living like this. I need to make some changes."* You know, maybe it's finally following your heart's desire and going after that dream or that thing you feel called that you are here to do.

You know, Jerusalem represents something that you know is important for you to do that is not easy. But you know you need to step into it. You know it'll make a difference and take your life to another level.

You know, Jesus had the courage to step into Jerusalem, even though he knew it wasn't going to be easy. He knew this was something he had to do. So I ask you: What is your Jerusalem? What is the thing that it is time for you to face and time for you to deal with? And time for you to fully step into to take your life to another level?

Sometimes when some of these tough things come up, we want to run. We want to avoid. But I love what Catherine Ponder said. She said, *"Until you move through it with grace, it will always show up in your face."* [Congregants laugh] And it's sort of the spiritual version of, *"You can run, but you can't hide."* We have spiritual things to do, and if we keep avoiding it, life in the universe will bring forth different versions of it until we choose to learn and extract the gift it came to teach.

Jesus in John 12:27-28 says, *"Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No. For this purpose, I have come to this hour."* And so, he's recognizing that this thing -- as hard as it was, as difficult it was going to be -- this was his, and he needed to welcome it. He needed to have the courage to step into it and walk through it.

To embrace this resurrecting power, we need to have that courage to face and walk into our own personal Jerusalem.

The second thing we learn is to **HAVE THE COURAGE TO DIE TO THE OLD**. For there to be a resurrection, there needs to be a crucifixion. And crucifixion represents a symbolic life principle: we need to be willing to die to the old to be born to the new. A caterpillar must die to its old self to be born anew in the form of a butterfly.

Do you know how the hardest things in life to die to are? It is our limiting beliefs and our rigid attitudes and judgments. When Paul said, *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind,"* he's saying that transformation requires us to release old, limiting thinking and to open ourselves to new levels of awareness and new levels of understanding. We must die to the mindset of lack and scarcity -- thinking there is never enough to be born into the mindset and consciousness of abundance. We need to be willing to die to the mindset of fear and failure and feeling like we're a victim. And this mindset of blaming others or drama or judgments.

To be born into a higher consciousness: a divine consciousness; a consciousness of love; a consciousness of abundance; a consciousness of possibility.

You know, we want life to be easy, and we wish we could just be born into the new. But to be born into the new, we have to die to something -- to our old self -- to be born to our true self.

Jesus said in one of his parables, *"You cannot put new wine in old wineskins."* And he's saying you can't put new ideas into an old mindset. It just doesn't work.

Lao Tzu put it this way. He said, *"You must let go of who you are to become who you are meant to be."*

Paul drove the point home even more powerfully of this principle when he said three simple words. And he said, *"I die daily."* What he is saying is: when this day is over, I'm not going to keep carrying over the negative stuff and drama and pain and keep repeating it tomorrow and each and every day. That we need to die to whatever happened today and let it go. Release it. Learn from it so we can see tomorrow with new eyes and not just keep spinning and living the same things over and over again.

So my question for all of us is: What belief or mindset do we need to die to -- to release -- to allow ourselves to be born to the new? To allow ourselves to be transformed and lifted up?

In 2 Corinthians it says, *"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See; everything has become new."*

How many people remember the movie *Good Will Hunting*? Anybody remember that movie? Old movie; fabulous movie. And here is the thing. Som here's Will Hunting: a genius, but he's working as a janitor. And he sabotages himself; he gets in these fights. And then, in his therapy learns He was abused in many different ways. And he really believes that everything in his life is his fault, and he keeps blaming himself. And he thinks he's unworthy; he's not good enough for a number of things: success, but also especially love and having a healthy relationship.

And it was only until his help with his therapist that he was able to die to that old belief and version of himself to be born to open up to a greater experience of love and a greater experience of life and a greater experience of success.

So, we all have to ask ourselves: What do I need to die to in order to be born into the new? Because it is a powerful principle. What do we need to let go and release to open a space for something greater in our lives?

The third thing is to **HAVE THE COURAGE TO SURRENDER INTO SILENCE**. In 1 Kings, Chapter 10, it says, *"After the wind, an earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire. And after the fire, a sound of sheer silence."* And it's making a point here that with all the fire stuff, all the earthquake stuff -- with all that -- what remains is silence. We don't hear the sound of sheer silence. because we're so busy, so active, so running around -- things are so loud, things are so noisy -- we miss the silence.

But you know what? Who's in the silence? God is in the silence. And wisdom is in the silence. The inspiration and clarity and the guidance we seek is in the silence. God speaks in silence. And that's why it says, *"Listen to the still small voice."*

The poet Rumi said, *"There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen."*

You know, spiritual holy men and gurus ... there are always stories of them going to mountain tops to pray. Going to deserts; going into caves to get away from the distraction of the world to sit in the silence. And because that is where the power is. Magnificent things are born and created and inspired if we are taking the time to surrender into the silence.

When you think about it, a tomb is the ultimate place of surrender. In those three days that Jesus was in the tomb, I don't know what happened ... but *something* happened. It was in that silence that something made it shift from dead and death and lifeless to aliveness; to awakening. You know, I mean, something happened and it's because of the silence.

Blaise Pascal said that all of humanity's problems stems from his inability to sit quietly in a room alone.

And my question for all of us to consider is: How well do you sit still? How well do you listen to the silence? What role does silence currently play in your spiritual life and practice? And how much more room would you be willing to commit and make to take time to surrender to the silence ... to open yourself to the inspiration, the guidance, and the miracle working of God that comes through surrendering to silence?

The fourth thing we learn in how to embrace the resurrection power in our lives is to **HAVE THE COURAGE TO RISE AND COME FORTH**. I heard somebody say just because you're breathing and moving doesn't mean you're living. That's sometimes we go through the motions of life. Sometimes we aren't living the life that we are meant to live.

So, we all need to ask ourselves a question: Am I living as full a life as I can live? Am I living the life that I want to live? Am I loving? You know, am I learning? Am I daring? Am I creating the things that I really want to create in my life?

And maybe: Where in my life am I not living my best? Where in my life am I stuck or feeling lost, or holding back, or playing small?

Og Mandino -- in his book, *The Greatest Miracle in the World* -- said, "*The greatest miracle in the world is coming back from the living dead.*" It is coming back from places where we are not engaged; where we are totally numbed out; or allowed fear to control our lives and stop us from doing the things that we want to do.

You know, with Lazarus, [Jesus said], "*Rise and come forth.*" That is the message for all of us. Let what is in you that is meant to be birthed and expressed come forth. And be living it and not just thinking about it or wishing for it.

Brent Smith said, "*The only thing missing from your life is what you're failing to bring to it.*" The only thing missing from your life is what you're failing to bring to it.

So again: What are you failing to bring to life? What are you not creating? What are you not contributing? What are you not learning? What are you not sharing?

We've got this power in us. The question is: Are we willing to have the courage to let it rise in us and come forth and give it life?

A man dies and goes to heaven, and he's at the Pearly Gates. And St. Peter says to him, "Have you done anything of any particular merit? Anything kind of brave that will help us make a decision on whether to let you into heaven or not?"

And he said, "Well, once I was driving, and I came upon a woman who was being harassed by a group of thugs. And typically I'd be afraid; I'd be too scared to go help, but I decided this time I would step up and I would help her. So I pulled over and I went up to the leader of the thugs, a big muscular guy who's wearing a leather jacket and he had a ring pierced through his nose. And I said, "Stop harassing this woman now or you're going to have to deal with me."

And I poked him with my finger in his chest. And then I reached up and I ripped out the nose ring from his nose and I said, "Do you understand me?" And I poked him in the chest one more time.

And St. Peter said, "Wow, that is impressive. That has got to be one of the most courageous acts I have ever heard of." And St. Peter said, "So when did this happen?"

And he said, "Oh, about three minutes ago." [Congregation laughs]

"As a child of God, I am a powerful spiritual being."

Together: [with congregation] *"As a child of God, I am a powerful spiritual being.*

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me together."

[With congregation]: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Easter is a reminder that the resurrecting power is within each and every one of us! But it takes courage: the courage to step into your Jerusalem; the courage to die to the old; the courage to surrender to silence; and the courage to rise and come forth.

Easter is inviting all of us to have the courage to embrace the resurrecting power within. God bless you all and happy Easter, everybody!