

As we approached Palm Sunday, a dear priest friend in New Zealand concluded her email to me with the sentence, “May we survive the Resurrection.” That sentence has been flitting through my thoughts and my prayer throughout Holy Week, all of the Easter services and is now lodged firmly in my heart as I write this Easter Monday.

Lent has been a killer for our congregation this year. Deaths of beloved patriarchs and funerals, and every Sunday’s Pastoral Prayer has lifted up another serious illness or loss that we have been grieving together. In the midst of this, we have been leading Lenten programs, planning Holy Week and Easter services, conducting a curriculum review of our Church School program, raising funds for the Youth Mission trip and all the regular business of keeping a Church running. This past Saturday, as we figured out how to re-schedule our rained-out Easter Egg hunt and helped the Church administrator collate bulletins while she rushed to an emergency dentist appointment for an abscessed tooth, I was pretty sure I wasn’t going to make it to Resurrection, never mind survive it.

Easter Sunday followed suit. Word reached us just before the 8:00 am service that another young man important to us had died. As I stood on the front steps, holding the Paschal candle while the new fire was kindled, another member of the Church quietly confided in me about a situation heavy on the heart. The morning for the staff went by in blur of realizing that the contra bass player’s chair in the chancel blocked access to the Paschal candle, acolytes arriving late, a short conversation with another grieving parishioner. At the last moment, the acolytes for the 11:15 realized that they didn’t have their annotated bulletins and we sent them down the aisle while another set of copies were made. It wasn’t until I was singing the Hallelujah Chorus at 12:40 that I realized we had, indeed, survived resurrection - and then I looked at my to-do list for this week; worship forecast due for Christian Education Sunday, agenda items for next week’s Christian Education Commission meeting and Pentecost planning. I went home and took a nap.

For those of us who are professionals in the Church, making meaning through worship and program for our congregations is hard work. I am sure I am not the only Church staff member exhausted and slightly frayed around the edges on this Easter Monday morning. Surely, this isn’t what my friend meant by “surviving resurrection?” Somewhere in the all the doing, I lost the being present to what the Spirit was doing. As I reflect back on last week, there were glimmers of resurrection that spoke to my soul: an amazing anthem the choir sang at the Maundy Thursday service, an impromptu community reflection on the Stations of the Cross experience as we shared it on Good Friday, the unity of purpose and the laughter of my ministry colleagues as we solved glitches and supported one another, the

absolute delight on the face of a brand new eight-year old acolyte as she somehow gracefully managed to light the very tall first candle on the candelabra at the 9:30 Easter service..

As I took my regular walk this Easter Monday morning, I was “pondering” all this in my heart. I heard woodpeckers, smelled hyacinths as I walked by a neighbor’s and sat on the stonewall in the field where the flock of turkeys I watch live and had a conversation with a gobbler. New life is right there all around me. I was reminded of how easy it is to forget to tend to the care and feeding of our own souls while responsible for the care and feeding of the souls of others. For me, at least, it is too easy see the goal as “surviving.” It struck me this morning that none of us are meant to “survive resurrection.” The empty tomb isn’t a call to survive. It is a radical reinterpretation of what it means to live fully in communion with God and with others.

Late one Easter season years ago, when my now twenty-two year old pseudo-atheist son was four, I leaned over to kiss him good night and the cross I was wearing bumped his nose. He grabbed it and said, “Mama, I know why the cross is empty. It’s because you can’t kill love.” THAT’S the Resurrection for which we have been preparing - a love so big that it turns everything inside out and upside down by emptying itself. That’s what I missed in my busyness and my planning and my to-do lists.

So, this week, I will still do my planning. But I am aiming to do better that “surviving resurrection.” I am asking for the grace and opening myself to the invitation to “live the Resurrection.” Alleluia! Amen.

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