

## “Resurrection Stories”

Luke 24: 1-12

*Love, Love-Jesus*

Jacopone da Todi, Christian mystic

Rev. Brian Heron

Eastminster Presbyterian Church

April 4, 2010

“Love, Love-Jesus” writes the mystic da Todi. It would not do justice to this poem to say that da Todi merely believes in Jesus. Wouldn't you agree? Rather, da Todi, like all mystics find themselves drowning in the experience of Jesus. He is infatuated, smitten, and lost in love for Jesus. It would be like asking a dancer, “Do you believe in dancing?” A dancer doesn't believe in dancing. A dancer just dances. A dancer feels the pulsating beat and moves to the rhythm of the music. A dancer experiences the dance. A dancer is an expression and an extension of the dance. In the same way the mystics are people who don't just believe in Jesus, but they are people so infused by Christ's spirit that they live, move and have their being in the risen Jesus.

What I just read to you was really a resurrection story. No, it wasn't the actual account of the resurrection as we read in Luke. Rather this poem by da Todi is a resurrection story in that it is an expression of a person who knows with every bone in his body that Jesus is alive. Because isn't that real proof of the resurrection? It isn't whether or not the gospel accounts can be proven. It isn't whether evidence is uncovered that there really was an empty tomb or notarized reports from a surprised coroner. The real proof of Jesus resurrection is the ongoing stories of people who experience the risen Jesus in life every day. The mystical love poem by da Todi is just one example of a person experiencing the risen, living Christ in his life.

I want to share with you three different brief resurrection stories today. If I were to capture the message in one short line it would be this: We don't believe in Jesus because of the story of resurrection. We believe in the resurrection story because 2000 years later we are still experiencing Christ. And as long as people continue to experience the risen, living, loving Jesus the story of the resurrection will have its place. The experience of Jesus comes first. Belief in the resurrection follows.

First story. About five years after Jesus death one Saul of Tarsus was traveling on the road to Damascus. Saul was considered the lead persecutor of Jewish Christians shortly after Jesus death. We have to remember that the accounts of Jesus resurrection weren't written until 45 years after his death. But, on this day five years after Jesus crucifixion as Saul was traveling he had an experience of Christ. Today we would call it a vision which led to a conversion experience. Here is how the book of Acts captures it:

‘Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”’

What is interesting about this is that scholars will tell you that the stories of the resurrection came much later. Paul would not have even heard about Jesus' resurrection. In fact, it is Paul who first began to talk about “crucified and risen Christ”—but not because he had heard of his resurrection, but because he had experienced the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

Second resurrection story. You won't find the language of Jesus or Christ or even God in the following song, but listen closely and see if you can hear the experience of Christ. See if you

can feel the presence of something sacred and divine in these lyrics. The song is written by Dan Fogelberg and is called *Netherlands*. These are some of the most beautiful lyrics I have ever heard. But, more importantly think about the experience that is just underneath the lyrics. Try to imagine what Fogelberg was feeling and see if you can feel the presence of the risen Christ in these lyrics.

High on this mountain  
The clouds down below  
I'm feeling so strong and alive  
From this rocky perch  
I'll continue to search  
For the wind  
And the snow  
And the sky  
I want a lover  
I want some friends  
And I want to live in the sun  
And I want to do all the things that I never have done.  
Sunny bright mornings  
And pale moonlit nights  
Keep me from feeling alone  
Now, I'm learning to fly  
And this freedom is like  
Nothing that I've ever known  
I've seen the bottom  
And I've been on top  
But mostly I've lived in between  
And where do you go  
When you get to the end of your dream?  
Off in the nether lands  
I heard a sound  
Like the beating of heavenly wings  
And deep in my brain  
I can hear a refrain  
Of my soul as she rises and sings  
Anthems to glory and  
Anthems to love and  
Hymns filled with early delight  
Like the songs that the darkness  
Composes to worship the light.

Can you feel what Fogelberg must have been feeling? Was the living Christ present?  
Story number three. Two years ago this month my mother-in-law, Mary Langford, died after succumbing to a stroke and dementia that ate away at her for over four years. I was very close to my mother-in-law. She was a counselor by profession and because we shared similar interests we loved to spend time together. While we lived in California Mary and I used to have a monthly date where we would go to dinner and a movie and just catch up on our lives.

Mary also had a beautiful soprano voice. She sang in the San Francisco Chorale, sang solos, and even traveled in Europe singing in some of the great cathedrals.

On the night before she died I visited her with my daughter, Julie. By the time we arrived she had been slipping in and out of consciousness and hadn't responded to anyone for a number of hours. I sat on her bedside and just talked to her holding her hand and stroking her hair. It was hard to not have her respond to any of my verbal cues. Finally, like I often do for members and patients who are dying I sang to her "Dona Nobis Pacem" which means "the peace of God." It was then that as I was singing Mary began to mouth the words with me and allowed a few sung notes to escape from her mouth. My daughter said later at the memorial service that it was the saddest and most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

What does one say about a moment like that? Everything I know about life tells me that this was the end. This was the end of my beloved mother-in-law's life. This was the end of our monthly dates. This was the end of our relationship. But, that is not what I felt in that moment. How does one explain that what I really felt was the presence of a deep, deep love in that room? How does one explain that rather than a rending of painful grief what we all felt was a deep connection with each other, with her and with God. How does one explain such experiences except to say that the risen, living Christ was right there among us that night.

The resurrection is not something to merely to believe. It is something to experience.

Christ is alive. How do we know? Not because the resurrection stories were proven to be true. But, because mystics like Jacopone da Todi sat in a prison cell and fell in love with the risen Jesus. Because the apostle Paul was confronted by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and was forever changed. Because singer Dan Fogelberg experienced the risen Jesus in the glory and beauty of nature from a mountaintop. And because a regular guy like me felt the presence of the risen Jesus even in the moment of death.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Know it. Believe it. Experience it!