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“As You Are Going”

Matthew 28:16-20

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Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. "

Matthew 28:16-20

When Carl Cannon is assigned duty at one of the most dangerous prisons in the world, he tries to get out of it. But his sergeant major told him he would have to face a court martial if he didn't go. So he went and quickly learned that it didn't matter what he did—the guards were always right. Because he wanted to survive, he backed his colleagues. Whenever one of the guards got a "No" from an inmate, Carl says they called him. "I was the best at turning a 'No' into a 'Yes,'" he says.

He eventually became the supervisor of the special housing unit—where inmates were locked down 24 hours a day. One day he got a call that the inmates had revolted. He went down to the floor where it was happening. He passed cell number 138. The inmate inside told him that he didn't do it. Carl believed him. He said, "Okay, don't worry about it. Clean up best you can. I'll handle this. "

At 4:30 the next morning, he opens the tunnel for the

breakfast carts, and he walks past cell number 138. He sees him hanging. He orders the door open and runs into the cell. There's not enough room in the cell to do CPR, so they pull his body into the corridor. The guard does the chest compressions. Carl has to do the breathing. They perform CPR for 10 minutes before the medics arrive. The other inmates start yelling at them, "Killers!"

And Carl gets mad at himself. He's mad because he knows someone took a shortcut. Some one of the guards had not checked cell 138. He knows because they had all been trained to take shortcuts.

When Carl left the prison that morning, he was determined to not go back. He didn't have to, but his captain encouraged him to remember those he worked with.

Carl thought about the inmate whose last words to him were, "I'm innocent. "

"I went back different," Carl says. "I went back with a battle cry called respect. And respect meant listening to people, listening to the inmates and their stories and their regrets...I learned that inmates are people, human beings. And human beings deserve respect too. "

So the guards started saying "please" and "thank you. " And because of those different words, the tone between the inmates and the guards became one of mutual respect.

Just last summer, Carl ended 21 years of providing job and life-skills training to high school students and former inmates. His experience as prison guard had changed him. It inspired the nonprofit he founded. He gave his life to supporting and resourcing those at-risk of ending up in the prison system.

Huge experiences that change our lives come along only every once in a while. Maybe when you crossed the threshold into parenthood, you realized your life could never be the same again. Or maybe it was a trip, going on pilgrimage, or the experience of 9/11, or the day before choosing sobriety. Whatever they may be, we mark our lives in the time before and the time after. How we see and interact with the world changes. We are different because of what we went through.

For followers of Jesus, the resurrection changes everything. Because love wins over hate and life over death, our whole lives have to be different. For Jesus' disciples, they can't go back to the time before Jesus. Jesus showed them what life could be like. They had seen hungry people fed, lonely people cared for, hurting people healed, outcasts included. They had seen behind the curtain. They're never going to feel like they belong again in the homes they left three years earlier. They walk into their bedrooms and can't imagine the version of themselves that used to live there. So they start tearing the One Direction posters off the wall. Every time they pass a cross, a rollercoaster of emotions sweeps over them. It makes them wonder if what they witnessed was really true. Some days it's too hard to believe, but they know for certain they don't care about One Direction anymore. The Beatitudes have anchored in their hearts instead.

When people don't think twice about taking advantage of each other, when mass shootings are increasing, and our world keeps getting hotter, death seems to be winning. But Jesus taught his followers to insist on love anyway. When the army comes to arrest Jesus, and one of his

followers pulls out a sword, Jesus heals the wounds that the fight creates. He insists on love, even when his life is threatened. He teaches them to love their enemies, to pray for those that persecute them, and he shows them exactly what that painful commandment means. Jesus' whole life, all the way through death, is revolutionary. He models what's possible and shows how much God loves us and how that love is crazy big, compassionate and healing.

And when he ascends, when he finally gets drawn into the life-giving energy of heaven, that's what he leaves with his disciples.

"Bear witness," he tells them. "As you live, be loving and healing and embracing. Teach others to do it too. Cover them in the love of God. May it spread like wildfire. And remember I'm always with you. "

Jesus' parting words helpfully remind them they're not supposed to go on the same anymore. But it's not quite about what they do, as it is more about how they do it. No matter how many translations of verse 19 we have, we keep hearing a command from Jesus to go. "Go and..." all the translations say. And forever it's been the impetus for colonial missions. But the Greek is a little more nuanced. *Poreunthetes* is a passive participle. It's a description, not an imperative. It means "having gone," or "as you have been going. " There's an understanding inherent in the word that time is passing. The action isn't completed. Instead of "Go and make disciples," Jesus says, according to Matthew, "As you have been going, make disciples. "

As you have been going, live in such a way that can't help but reflect God's miracle. As you have been going, trust love overall. As you have been going, bear witness to

the Christ who is alive and present everywhere.

Because of the resurrection, we know the light that enlivens everyone and everything. Christ is risen. He's with us everywhere. Love is what wakes us up in the morning, pours our coffee, washes our clothes. It's all a miracle. The hope that comes from somewhere deep inside us and keeps us pushing forward, the phone call from a friend that calms our spirit, the buds on the trees, the rhythm in the song playing in our headphones, the silence on our block in the middle of the day, the deep, long exhale that calms our whole nervous system, baby giggles, a hug from a friend, bird songs, life-giving rain. It's all miracle.

We bear witness to the resurrection by insisting on lives that recognize the miracle of incarnation. There's holiness in being alive. Our Christ-given calling is to live whole, healing lives. We get to experience the risen Christ when we pay attention and allow ourselves to be here. God is here. So when death feels strong, start by noticing. Start by practicing gratitude.

Practicing resurrection means living as if God has already won. Because God has! It's letting the truth that love is the biggest and most radical thing of all define everything you do. Resurrection doesn't make sense. So when we practice it, we do things that don't quite make sense. It means that even though you know people can be mean, you choose to reach out anyway. You choose to hold the door anyway. It looks like tipping a little extra on your day off, even though you know you don't have the money to. It looks like planting flowers in an abandoned lot. It looks like taking care of stray cats. It looks like Dave Grohl smoking meat for 24 hours at a homeless shelter. It

looks like a teenager collecting and donating 15,000 books to children undergoing cancer treatment, after wading through the grief of a parent with cancer.

Practicing resurrection means staying open to life because you know God is not done yet.

On April 15, 2013, ten years ago yesterday, Gillian Reny was waiting at the finish line of the Boston Marathon for her sister when two bombs went off. She and her parents were rushed to the hospital, where they were treated for minor injuries. But doctors fought to miraculously save Gillian's legs. Not even a year later, the Reny family established the Stepping Strong fund to support trauma care. And in 2017, it grew into a full research center. What felt like death couldn't hold them in despair. The Reny family has turned tragedy into physical healing and hope for people affected by trauma worldwide.

Death cannot hold us. We are Easter people. We are alive in resurrection.

In Wendell Berry's poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," he says:

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.

...

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,

that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

...

Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.

...

Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

We don't have to go around telling people we are disciples of Jesus. All we have to do is fill our lives with resurrection. The way we live our lives is our witness to love.

So as you go about living, believe in life after death so much so that you can't give up on this world. Recycle, compost, even. Plant bulbs in the fall, knowing they won't break through until the spring.

As you go, give yourself permission to be human. Ask for forgiveness. Recognize the humanity in everyone around you. Don't hold grudges.

As you go, believe in God's abundance. Share hand-me-downs with neighbors. Make a little extra food for dinner and invite a friend over. Be generous with your money. Feed the hungry. Create safe space for those on the margins. Learn a new language.

As you go, bring peace. Be patient with yourself. Be gentle with others. Listen for truth. Be the kind of person that helps others take a breath of relief. Don't make assumptions. Keep asking questions. Pay attention to those who are hurting.

As you go, be so loving that it spreads like wildfire. Thank God, we can't ever be the same again.

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