

St. Paul points out powerfully that the resurrection of Jesus is historically unique, but universally it will continue to happen in every moment of our life. He says, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain." The resurrection of Jesus is not only the foundation of our faith, but also of our daily life. It is not only a historical event that happened in the past but impacts us and forms us who we are, but also a universal event that we may experience in our ordinary life. In order to fully understand the resurrection of Jesus and figure out what it really means to us, we have to be able to experience resurrection moments in our daily life. Let's take a short journey together this morning with the word, "Resurrection."

Easter Sunday morning is such a powerful moment when everything comes down to one word, that is, "life" (perhaps life after life after life). It is hope for eternal life; it is infinite possibility in spite of impossibility, and it is a roadmap to an unknown future. Resurrection has been an unexpected, totally surprising gift to humanity; it surpasses every wisdom and understanding and knowledge; it overcomes all human conditions, such as fear of death, anxiety for the future, and grief & suffering for broken relationships. I mean because of this resurrection experience we cannot look back in the past anymore but look forward in the future, we cannot be stuck in the past, but move forward into a promised journey to eternal life. What I am saying here is we cannot miss this kind of hope, because it is the foundation of our human life.

So Easter morning has never been the same moment because once the body of Jesus was raised from the dead, everything has been changed. Since Jesus was resurrected, through his resurrection we have experienced resurrection moments everyday knowingly or unknowingly. It is like opening up a gate of infinite possibilities and everlasting life revealed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Easter morning, at least the first one, could be a total chaos, or a total upside-down, or a panicking moment, but it brings a new life and new spirit into the dead body and spirit. Our perspective on things that mattered most for ourselves was totally changed, because Easter morning is a brand new lens that penetrates us deep inside who we are.

For instance, my perspective on life was totally changed when I was staying at a hospital to take care of my mother who was greatly ill a week ago. When two doctors at two different hospitals said, 'No, we cannot

do any more at this point, because the case is too risky to have a surgery," after the CT/MRI tests, out of grave despair and frustration and fear, my sisters and brother couldn't give up on their mother so they tried to call every possible person to reach the best of the best doctors in the nation. Within two days they could go up to Seoul and make an appointment with one of the best doctors who is specialized in the particular cancer, and the surgeon could schedule a surgery right away within a week without waiting list. I was the one who had some doubts about the outcome of the surgery because of the high level of risk about that surgery. And the stats said 90% of the people with bile duct cancer would not be able to survive either surgery or treatment. But after the successful surgery, my mother survived it so far, her recovery has been going well, and I said to her before I came back home, "mother, you are a walking miracle," and I said to my family, "we are the people of resurrection hope." Whatever happens from now on, we will be ready to faithfully walk along with God. It will be a sacred moment, the holiest moment of all that we might experience the same resurrection hope. And my family and I do that everyday.

We are the Easter people who are seeking resurrection in our daily life. After the long winter we are longing for a warm weather where life begins over again. Birds are coming back, sitting on branches and singing, and trees are budding, and grounds are turning green again. It is amazing to see everything start over again when spring comes, when time comes of age. When a baby was born, we are convinced that life will continue, no matter what happens. Death will be temporary, death is not the last word, but life will be eternal. That is the message of resurrection hope that Jesus wants us to experience.

So I have been thinking about an image that might help us describe Easter and the resurrection hope at this very moment, as I read gospel stories over and over again. It is not an Easter bunny or egg for sure. It is not even an Easter Sunday morning with huge crowds nor a family lunch or dinner with traditional recipes after service. It is not a magnificent music nor an eloquent message nor a beautiful Easter lily. I am sorry to say this (please don't get me wrong), but it is true in many aspects. Although all of them are part of our Easter tradition in which we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, this morning my Easter image is "a rough, clumsy, and hard stone" that blocked the empty tomb where the body of Jesus was supposed to be laid down. That stone was rolled away in the early Easter morning. It is the stone that locked up the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea gave to Jesus without knowing that it was going to be of no use for Jesus.

After Jesus died on the cross, after he breathed his last breath on the rugged cross, his body was moved into a deep, dark cave that was completely sealed with the huge stone. It was on the good Friday night. After 3 days later on the Easter morning the stone was rolled away, no one knew who did it, (maybe God or angels might be able to do that) but the body was gone, and the tomb remained empty.

Whatever we would like to imagine, it is true to say that inside the tomb resurrection happened; inside the dark and damp cave the body was resuscitated, the spirit of Jesus movement came back alive (*revenant*; spirit in French), his spiritual revolution started again with the greatest confidence, and most of all, his death was transformed into eternal life, since his resurrection confirms that death is temporary, but life is eternal.

We cannot bury this powerful resurrection moment even with the huge stone. Roman soldiers couldn't seal the tomb evidently. Religious leaders' ideological conspiracy couldn't bury Jesus' messianic force of revolutionary movement. Ordinary people's militant messianism on the market street couldn't ruin the new world that just began with Jesus the rebel.

How about you? I think we have lots of stones that might block the way to the empty tomb where Jesus came alive, where his transforming ministry to the poor would last forever, where eternal life would be promised for those who believed in his resurrection. Sometimes or many times we block it with our own stones.

A stone wall of division, discrimination, and exclusion that blocks a way of unity and inclusion;

A stone of sarcastic cynicism and doubt that hinders optimism and hope;

A stone of pessimistic limit and decline that conceals a passage to opportunity and renewal;

A stone of blame that petrifies a spirit of responsibility;

A stone of nostalgia that blurs a vision for the future;

A stone of fear and anxiety that numbs our sense of love and compassion.

A stone of ego and pride and prejudice that devalues humility and humbleness;

A stone of status quo that stops growing and daring and adventuring and risk-taking;

Now I urge you all to throw away these stones and revisit the empty tomb, the place for infinite possibilities and opportunities to grow, the place for eternal life.

Let go of those useless stones that keep you from the resurrection hope which is real in your life.

Let go of things that keep you from God and let it die on the cross. Then you will see something new grow out of the death valley and out of the empty tomb.

Easter people, do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Do you believe in the resurrection that is happening in your daily life?

Will you let go of those useless stones that keep you from God and the resurrection of Jesus?

Easter people, if you truly believe in the resurrection of Jesus, his spiritual revolution will come alive and transform us, our community and our world into a new level of being-together-well again and again.

Please take a stone from the baskets or the prayer rail here and there, and if you like, go and visit the Palisades park this afternoon and throw it to the Cedar River or to your yard, or keep it as a reminder. And let go of all the stones that block the way of Jesus' resurrection hope. Let go of all things that keep you from envisioning the resurrection hope in your life. And If you do that, I am convinced that you will see yourself renewed with the power of the resurrection hope. Amen!

*O God of resurrection hope, we give you thanks and praises for your amazing work in Jesus Christ who gives us eternal hope for life. Empower us again to walk along with Jesus and bear witness to the resurrection hope that moves us forward and helps us to see otherness and differences in our midst. May the resurrection hope change our perspectives to embrace God's children around the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*