Practice Resurrection

April 2, 2006 (5th Sunday in Lent, Year B)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 Psalm 51 Hebrews 5:5-10 John 12:20-33

My first sermon at Messiah, 9 months ago, I preached about seeds: peas and lima-beans sprouting in paper cups, planted in the playground; the miraculous harvest of God's love. The kingdom of heaven, Jesus had told the crowd at the Sea of Galilee, the kingdom of heaven is like a handful of seeds broadcast on good soil and rocky soil and amid thorns. And the seeds thrown on to good soil deepen and blossom and yield thirty- and sixty-and even a hundred-fold!

It was summertime, and we were in the midst of blooming gardens and warm weather. There was none of the uncertainty of Spring, or the barrenness of Winter, or the dissolution of Autumn. Matthew's gospel fit right in to the season: Jesus preaching to the crowd about the supernal abundance of God grown great from small seed.

Now it is Spring, the daffodils and tulips are just putting up their confident leaves, and new life is returning to barren gardens. For Iza and me, one of the joys of Spring in our new garden is the surprise of seeds and bulbs breaking through the ground.

Some of these bulbs are bulbs we planted, but there are crocuses and irises we knew nothing about, bulbs put down some past autumn by the people who used to live in our house. We walk through the little strip of garden by our house, delighted and surprised by what is springing forth. It is a blessing to be surprised by new life. It is a way that we can practice resurrection.

Practice resurrection. When I am feeling down, I find gardening very hard. The act of burying seeds and planting bulbs cuts too close to the bone, is too close to death. What if none of the seeds come back to life? What if all the bulbs are rotten, or I've put them upside-down, or the squirrels eat them all?

When we are afraid of death, it is hard to practice resurrection: Putting seeds and bulbs and bare roots into the soil, covering them up in the darkness of the earth, leaving them to break open, hidden from view, and letting ourselves be surprised by what God brings forth.

Practice resurrection.

This is the mystery of our faith: Christ crucified, Christ raised from the dead: The seed scattered on the hillside, gathered in the harvest broken in the mill brought together in the bread broken at the table united in the Body of the Church.

This is the mystery of our faith. The holy confidence that death is not some odd mistake, but a wholly natural and naturally holy part of being alive – and that at our death, we become like the seed in the ground, set down to rest and darkness so that we can rise up in strength and glory in the love of God.

It is inexplicable – it is something we discover in our hearts, it is something we feel through love, the deep, mad knowledge that the people we love and see no more have not been wiped from history but have moved from glory into glory, always with God there at our birth, there through our lives, there at our death. The Now and the Ever.

We go into the garden, we gather around this table, to practice resurrection.

Practice resurrection. The more you think and wonder about death, Barbara Croft writes, the less tragic it appears: *We are the ones who assert at least once a week that this life and this world, much as we love it, is far from being all there is. That there is an immense context to us, a context of which we are almost completely unaware, waiting to be discovered and experienced.*

No thanks, says the seed. I don't want to taste water and feel the sun, feel a tiny green shoot in my heart grow and grow until it bursts out

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into the light. I'll pass: don't want to become a great sunflower or a nodding poppy, an oak tree. Nah -- just let me stay here in my envelope with pictures of these things on the outside.

But the Gardener has other ideas. You're going to love it once you get going, he says, and presses the seed into the warm earth, sifting a little soil on top of it and pressing again. He pours a gentle shower of water on top and blesses it all. Enjoy your next chapter, he says. I know I will -- I can't wait to see what you become.[1]

As you go out of church today, there's a small gift for you: those precious envelopes of garden seeds. Take a packet of seeds from the credence table, scatter them in your garden, or plant them in a pot by a window sill – plant the seed into the warm earth, bury it in a little soil and press it down, bless it with water and a little prayer, and practice resurrection.

[1] Barbara Crofton "The Life in the Seed," *Daily eMo, 3/31/06*

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