

1 Death is a difficult thing to face, but sometimes facing life can be even harder.

Consider, for example, the legendary story of Margorie McCall, whose tombstone reads: “Lived once, buried twice.”

Times were hard in the 1700s, and people made a penny wherever they could. Some trades were frowned upon, however, and rightly so. One such trade was that of the resurrectionist, also known as a grave robber...This practice was however to prove a hair raising experience for once such band of grave robbers in Lurgan [Ireland] in 1705.

Margorie McCall was wed to a doctor... Sadly, Margorie succumbed to [a] bout of fever and was buried in Shankill Church of Ireland Cemetery. She was hastily buried for fear of the fever spreading ..Margorie was buried still wearing her beautiful gold wedding ring. Due to her husband's inability to remove it from her finger, which had swollen considerably since her death, but news of the treasure leaked out to the resurrectionists...That evening, before the soil had time to settle on Margorie's coffin, the grave-robbers paid a visit. Working under cover of darkness they grappled in the dirt until they reached and opened her coffin. True to the rumour, the ring was still on her finger. Before removing the body, they attempted to purloin the valuable item, but it wouldn't budge...[S]ince she couldn't get any deader, they agreed to cut off her finger to free the ring...Marjorie came to ... sat bolt upright, eyes wide and wailed like a banshee. There are differing reports as to the fate of the body-snatchers: one states that one of the men dropped dead on the spot from fright; the other that they both ran for their lives, never to resume their dubious occupation...Margorie helped herself out of the ground and stumbled the short distance to her home.

At home, her husband John was sitting with their children and relatives, bemoaning her passing and toasting her journey to a better place [, w]hen the door rapped three times... [U]pon opening the door John was confronted by his “late” wife – dressed in her burial clothes, dripping from her almost severed finger, but very much alive. John's response is disputed, but most tellings of this story agree that he dropped dead on the floor...[and]

was buried in the plot Margorie had recently vacated.¹

2 Thankfully, the Easter account isn't quite so creepy as the story of Marjorie McCall. And yet, both narratives point to one perplexing question: What do we do when we've been preparing for death but are surprised with life? In the light of resurrection, can we face life?

Mary, Peter, John, and soon all of Jerusalem were rocked by the news of the resurrection of Jesus and his post-resurrection appearances. Their reaction to his death was pretty ordinary. Their reaction to his resurrection can teach us something about resilience in facing life. Let's rejoin Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning. I'm continuing in chapter 20 of the Gospel of John, picking up with verse 11 of the New Living Translation.

{Read John 20:11-18, NLT}.

3 Have you ever wanted to quit so badly that you were actually hoping for something to fail? Years ago I was leading a new church plant in a shopping center while also serving as a pastor at the "mother" church. It was exhausting work- physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. After pouring my life into that work for a few years, we made the decision that most church plants these days eventually face: we just weren't going to be able to grow to a sustainable size, so we stopped, with most of the worshippers moving to the mother church. Honestly, a part of me was relieved. It's not that I wanted the church to die, but I didn't know if I could face that kind of life much longer.

Have you ever been there? Exhausted from living or working or something else and just wanting to say, "I quit," to lie down and rest for a while? I imagine that might have been some of what the disciples were feeling after the death of Jesus. They had been on this intense, all-in, three-year road trip with Jesus, only to have all their dreams come crashing down around them. They had all abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and watched, helplessly, as he was tried, beaten, and then nailed to a cross, his lifeless body sealed in a tomb as the cabal of the religious establishment continued its conspiracy of oppression with their Roman occupiers. If ever there was a time for the disciples to submit a letter of resignation, that last week would have been it. But what happened next was an even

¹ <http://www.lurganancestry.com/mmccall.htm>

greater test of their allegiance to Jesus. Hunkered down in fearful hiding, they were all prepared to quietly fade back into the crowd, when suddenly they were surprised with the empty tomb and the question it brought to each of them. “Can I face life?”

4 The resurrection of Jesus changed everything, but when you’ve made up your mind to quit, re-engaging life can be a challenge. We’ve gotten so used to thinking about resurrection as something that happens when we die, we forget that there’s more to it than that. Jesus offers us resurrection in the here and now as well, just as he did to Mary, Peter, and the other disciples on Easter morning. The question is, will we reach out and grab the prize of new life, or will we quit, content with failure, disappointment, and regret? Mary Magdalene made her choice quickly, drying her tears and springing into action, joyfully running to the others to tell them, “I have seen the Lord!”²

Others, such as Thomas, need a little more convincing. How about you? What’s the orientation of your heart this morning? Have you gotten so used to the heavy weight of grief that you’ve forgotten what it feels like to live? Are you so tired from working 24/7 without a break that the idea of waking up with a smile on your face is only a faded dream? Has loneliness or fear or despair become your new normal so much so that you can’t even imagine living any differently? The resurrection of Jesus means that everything that Jesus did and said is true, which means that in Jesus we find our living water, the bread of life, and the Way to life together and in joy. In the risen Jesus we find our reason for living, our way of facing life.

But maybe grief or despair isn’t where you’re at. Some Christians avoid facing life by spending all their time hanging out at the empty tomb, every morning going down to the tomb, marveling that it’s empty, and repeating it all the next day. That’s basically what we do when we hear the Good News of the risen Jesus without facing our lives in light of that truth and making the choices and changes in our days that demonstrate to the rest of the world that the tomb is empty. Mary didn’t hang out at the empty tomb. She ran to tell the others, and we know from what we read in the Acts of the Apostles that life was never the same for any of them, or indeed, for the whole world.

² John 20:18, NLT (2nd Ed.)

5 I know, life can be complicated. The resurrection of Jesus doesn't make all that complexity go away. It doesn't mean that everything we face in life is suddenly easy. But it does make very clear to us what our goal is: telling and showing the world, "We have seen the Lord!" And the really exciting part of all this? Every step we take along the crazy, curvy paths we call life, we can take with other Christians and with the resurrection power of Jesus, who has sent us the Spirit of power and joy to sustain us and lead us. Can we face life? Because of the resurrection of Jesus, the answer is "yes!"

6 Resilience is a popular buzzword these days. It means something like the ability to bounce back rather than crash when the circumstances of life surprise us. It's easy to describe, but achieving it is a different thing all together. One pastor offers this challenge to resilience in light of the resurrection of Jesus:

To practice resurrection means to make a commitment to put into practice core beliefs of the Easter story of hope and of life after disappointment, loss and death...The resurrection of Jesus is God's hopeful gift to us and to the world. It is up to us to decide whether we will choose to receive, embrace and live into this gift of hopefulness. It is our choice to decide whether each day we will look at the possibilities of new beginnings and of hopeful new ways of looking at the world, our own lives, our own relationships, and our own communities. Practicing resurrection elevates resilience to a whole new level.

[R]esurrection is much more than merely bouncing back. Resurrection is bouncing forward, not only recovering from a loss or difficult time, but also eventually transcending that loss and moving into a whole new, deeper way of living... God is always creating that new life in and around us. It is up to us to recognize it, to practice it, and to share it with others, not just on Easter, but throughout the year.³

³ <https://www.livingcompass.org/wwow/resurrection-and-resilience/>



Buffalo United Methodist Church



...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!

609 8th Street NW

Buffalo, MN 55313

763-682-3538

Bill Reinhart, Pastor

pastorbill@buffaloumc.com