

Practicing Resurrection

April 12, 2009

Easter Sunday

In the days of my childhood with the coming of spring and Easter, out came the jump ropes and the songs to which we kept the rhythm to our play:

“Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Can you tell me if I’m wrong

If I die before I wake

Jesus promised my soul to take

Amen, brother Ben, lets do this

Over again...”

And so we have, again and again.

Easter; the eternal resurrection of life; winter into spring. From the dawn of all time, the seasons have turned; long before the revelations of Jesus and long before the early church fathers could conjure any theological truths about what it all might mean.

We are no strangers to the concept of resurrection and we are so taken with the possibilities of such an idea that we have, in many ways, incorporated it’s theme throughout our lives, almost unconsciously, as if it has been with us forever.

To resurrect means to restore, to revive, to rebuild and to renew. The four “R’s”, exercised everyday of our lives while we are here. To steal a quote from T.S. Eliot, “You are the music while the music lasts...” and in the playing of our life symphonies we are not content to wait, to leave the act of resurrection to be found only at the end of our lives. Rather we are masters of impatience, perpetrators of the “just in case” philosophy of life; more specifically we have the need to control as much as we can while we are here.

We are on a great mystery ride from one day to the next, often without a clue as to what may land in our laps. So we in turn, in our own way, savor the lessons of our earthly experience and resurrect all we can, of the best of this life, to keep us happy and comfortable for as long as possible. We restore, revive, rebuild and renew!

First in our daily pursuit of resurrection, as we age we struggle to RESTORE ourselves, ideally to maintain our youthful form, to recreate what once was when we were younger. The best example I can conjure is the one contributed by Helena Rubinstein, Revlon and Estee' Lauder to name a few!

Last week I happened to pass the cosmetics counter in the department store where, "I never, never, never pay full price," and I was amazed at the variety. I don't use cosmetics as I am allergic to most of them and have never paid much attention to what was out there. On counter after counter was night crème and day crème and in between crème; anti-wrinkle, glare proof, sweat resistant, waterproof cremes, toning agents, firming gels, moisturizers, line erasers in every conceivable color and lighting combination. There was one for the woman baking over a hot stove, for the executive working under the harshness of florescent lighting and even a cosmetic to alleviate the greenish glow of mercury vapor flood lights in a parking lot! There was an entire section devoted just to eyes! My! When the clerk at the checkout counter asked if I had a senior citizen discount card, my reverie came to an abrupt end. I confessed that I was guilty of no attempt to hide who I am, just au natural, obviously looking much in need of some artificial help to cover over the dreaded curse of aging.

If we believed that we were really meant to age, showing symptoms of getting closer to death, to a better life after this one, then wouldn't the road maps on our faces be left alone, as a kind of badge of time; a tribute to coming closer to that experience of resurrection that so many wait for, not something to be covered up, avoided, and eliminated?

The manufacture and use of cosmetics is 6,000 years old, evident in the archeological excavations of ancient Egypt which unearthed face powders and eye liners derived from herbs and plants. The concepts of resurrection and reincarnation are just as old as the use of cosmetics and universal to all cultures. If the natural signs of aging are indeed indicative of an impending end to life on this earth, bringing us closer to the afterlife that so many wait and pray for, then we have an interesting way of showing our devotion to this idea, by covering up the evidence of our advancing years, by trying to RESTORE what we once were, rather than honoring and accepting what we are. (I don't get it?)

Secondly we live in a technological time where more medical and scientific advances have taken place in the last 30 years than in all of human history combined. For many of those centuries, medicine and religion were one and universally mixed. Illness was a sign that we were out of favor with God. Healing was the purification, the absolution from that dreaded punishment. We are generally unhappy with the idea of illness, of growing old and dying, why else would we endeavor to stop that process altogether? Medicine seeks to fulfill the second principle of resurrection that of the REVIVAL of the whole body, through any means possible. The rise in cryogenics speaks for itself!

We have taken it upon ourselves to attempt to end all pain and suffering. In spite of the great attraction to the concept of an afterlife, I believe that there are many more of us out there that support the "here and now, stay well and strong" philosophy. Most will do anything to prolong the inevitable, to keep us away from that ancient idea of illness meaning falling out of favor with God. We do this by proving that we do have some control over our destinies, by inviting medicine to keep us alive, even when our time may have come to say our final good-bye.

We are resurrected by what medicine can give to us and we show no signs of stopping that human intervention.

We generally go not wish to grow old before the judgment day has come and have worked tirelessly to take that control out of the hands of the natural world or whatever God or the powers that be have in store for us. Basically we don't trust the myth, even though many claim to believe it.

Life as we know it today has never ceased to invite us to explore our options in any way we can. We are not a "lie down and what will be will be" society. Technology has seen to that premise. In spite of our massive advances in prolonging life and hiding the evidence of aging, the third definition of resurrection is one of the most relevant to us, the third "R", **REBUILDING.**

We do this every day. We trip and fall and make mistakes and sometime hurt the ones we love. We rebuild emotionally and physically, in relationships and when the forces of nature or events of human unkindness seek to destroy our homes and our property and sometimes our lives. Within that third "R" lies courage and perseverance and the willingness to take responsibility for correcting the wrongs that are inflicted upon us, even when it makes us angry and feeling alone and helpless.

We are the music until the music stops and we know it and believe it. A close friend of my family, a musician said to me one day, "Could you imagine the lead violinist in the symphony missing a note or making a mistake and in his anger smashing his violin and walking off the stage?" I guess at times that what life tempts us to do when we face the loss of things we have worked for, but we know a tantrum is of no avail. So we keep playing to rebuild and resurrect within the framework of what is left and strive to do the best we can. Learning to live with a few bad notes is far better than having to buy a new violin!

The fourth "R" **RENEWAL brings us to our message of Easter; from the pagan rites of spring, the value of which even the early Christian Church recognized and synchronized with the so called heathens of early Roman times. Spring is a time of renewal, when we shed our winter coats and rip**

off the plastic from our leaky storm windows. It is the time when we put away our shovels and salt and sand to hide Easter Eggs for the children and to share a family meal, send a greeting card or two with those we might have lost touch with, and maybe even to bid those atrocious heating bills, adieu until the first cold snap of fall.

Throughout our lives we rejoice in our opportunities for resurrection over and over again.

Easter with all of it's symbolism and promise has empowered us and inspired us, not only as one might envision as it could be in an afterlife, but in giving us a motivation for our faith, to preserve the best of our living, the quality of our lives in the here and now.

We are resurrected continually as we attempt to RESTORE our appearance to that of eternal youth, as we REVIVE our bodies from illness and prolong the quality of our living through the technology of medicine; we REBUILD what was lost from tragedy and disaster and within our relationships with one another. We are eternally RENEWED by the promise of spring and Easter in the joy of the changing of the seasons from darkness into light and from the gifts of our own progress.

Ultimately the cosmetic companies do not sell only cosmetics to RESTORE what once was. They sell something much more important. They sell us HOPE, hope of eternal youth. The advances in medicine do not just produce a cure to REVIVE the sick they bring us HOPE of recovery when illness strikes or when bodies fail. The strength to REBUILD what was lost is more than an attempt to fix the broken; it is the capacity we have to practice HOPE to restore what was lost.

Easter brings not only the promise of resurrection for some, but also a RENEWAL of the earth and ourselves but it fosters the remarkable resilience of the human spirit in unison with the coming of spring and new life.

It is the HOPE that our efforts and our dreams for the future will indeed remain eternal. We are the joy of the here and now. We are the promise for tomorrow. We are the HOPE of things to come.

Yes, we are the music while the music lasts.

Happy Easter, Happy Spring.

Amen

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