

Colossians 3:1-4

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

John 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

"This Resurrected Life"
The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee
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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I have lived in some fear for the last three months, fear that my black thumb would be part of killing the beautiful Clivia plant at John and Carol Merrifield's house. I am especially glad today, having seen its spectacular orange blossoms, to know that their 23-year-old plant did not meet its end while in my care. Watching it blossom from its long idle state reminded me of what happened to another plant that was long in my care.

My friend Allan had a tall and spindly dracaena plant when I first knew him. We always called it his palm tree, because the long drooping leaves make it look like a mini one. In the several years we knew one another, I watched it grow to the point it hit the ceiling of the apartment. Eventually, it bent over, and most of the leaves dried to brown and fell off. So, we cut the plants off to around a foot tall, and cut the tops *up* to around the same length before shoving them into soda bottles full of water to root them. Much to our amazement, the tops grew green again, and the bottom grew up from where it had been severed. Leaving out here other important parts of the story, after Allan's death a couple of years later, I inherited one of the two plants. His mother took the one that had grown up from where we had cut it down, and I smiled to see it in her dining room each time I visited for years later. He and I had eventually cut the plastic bottles off from around the new roots, and planted two of the newly rooted plants in one large pot, and they thrived for several years until I took them home. I left it with my mother when I left the country for a

time, and when I checked on it at Christmastime, discovered it had been stuck in a corner where it was untended, and so had died. (And for the record, I inherited my black thumb from her . . .) I put it in her garage, stuck on a work table to the side of one window facing east. It was July when I returned home, and in visiting my mom, I happened to look in the garage. There, tucked on the shelf, where I had left a shriveled leafless stub were several new, short shoots coming up from the soil. Where the tops of the plant had died, the roots had continued to live, and produced three new plants I later transplanted.

Life is like this sometimes. I think sometimes our expectation of destruction; our expectation of death makes us give up on situations and on people long before we should. We need only look around us to know how this happens in very real ways around this globe of ours. I'm reminded of what Desmond Tutu remarked, as quoted in "No Future Without Forgiveness." He was speaking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa following the end of Apartheid rule. "After the grueling work of the commission I came away with a deep sense – indeed an exhilarating realization – that, although there is undoubtedly much evil about, we humans have a wonderful capacity for good. We can be very good. That is what fills me with hope for even the most intractable situations." There is certainly room for more forward movement in the struggle for racial equality worldwide; for the unqualified embrace of difference. Still, we might maintain hope in even the most intractable situations.

Sometimes, too, what comes out of the darkest times and circumstances is in a different form than what we expect. Sometimes we need to let go of what we have known, to let go of our belief that the familiar is the only thing that is good. Sometimes only then can we experience the broader and more exciting possibilities that God has in store for us. I was thinking about this last spring, when Keira was

studying from home and had to plant seeds for a Biology class. She and Emma also had to plant seeds in a class when they were in elementary school, but Keira was a lot more clinical about it in her young adulthood. She was far more aware of what has to happen to a seed for a plant to grow. Most of them split apart and eventually dissolve into the earth in order for the plant to grow. What I found myself thinking last spring was also more clinical. What if we tried to preserve seeds just as they were? What of our food sources? What of our beautiful flowers?

I imagine the disciples must have felt a little like this in the days before his crucifixion. We hear a bit of this in the 16th chapter of Matthew, when Jesus predicts his death. “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Our human concerns might just be getting in the way of the goodness and the glory that God has in store for us. Our human fears of change might be keeping us from living into possibilities for new growth that look more like dracaena hitting the ceiling on a second run than they do like the ones sitting in the dark of my mother’s garage when I gave up on them.

I'm sure the tomb was darker. I'm just as sure that Mary, Peter and the beloved disciple were expecting only to continue to grieve when they arrived that morning. In her consideration of the Easter story as it is written in Mark, Sarah Drummond, who is the inaugural dean of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale, writes the following: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome were ready for one kind of problem when they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The stone in front of the tomb was likely to be too heavy for them, and they were so preoccupied on their walk by this likely obstacle that the angel took them by surprise. "Do not be alarmed," the angel told them. But how could they not be alarmed by what they saw and heard: An empty tomb? A message of resurrection?"

So often we brace ourselves for one set of possibilities, only to turn around and face challenges for which we never could have prepared. A parent worries about a decline in his teenage child's grades, only to learn that the same child is struggling with depression. A hardworking manager strives to protect some of her staff members from layoffs, only to receive word that her entire branch is shutting down. As we read in Amos 5:19, it is "as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear." I love that I am still learning from a seminary teacher.

We know along with my friend Sarah that Mary and the other women, that Mary and the disciples don't only discover that their Lord's body has been moved. They discover that God can take our worst circumstances and can make them into something that gives new life. Whether or not we open our eyes of faith to see these changes is usually the issue. Sometimes, we don't want to be radically remade. Sometimes, we believe that we are too old, or too tired, or too weak or simply too impatient for any real change to happen in our lives.

God knows different. God knew that the plan all along was that God would take human form, but only for a time. Jesus would live among us, but in dying would be raised above us, so that we, also, can be raised. Paul teaches us in words we can understand: "We will not all die, but we will all be changed." This is the story of the resurrection. This is the story of God's grace-filled gift through Jesus Christ. I love a benediction I sometimes share in worship, which begins with Jesus' words in Luke 18, verse 1: Jesus said, "You ought always to pray and not to faint." The prayer continues, "Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger women and men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; but for power equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work will be no miracle -- you will be the miracle. Every day you will wonder at yourself and the richness of life, which has come to you by the grace of God." "We will be the miracle." Yes, and as the passage from Colossians today tells us, our lives really should look different in the face of Easter Sunday. Our faithful living will be the miracle in someone else's life, proving that their lives can be resurrected. God can do all things, even raise up that which is dead; even bring to gladness the greatest sorrow; even give us hope in the miracle of sharing in life eternal. May it be so for us.