

EXPERIENCING THE RESURRECTION HERE AND NOW

Acts 10: 34-43; John 20: 1-18

Lis Cashin was a young girl of thirteen living in England. From the outside, Lis' life seemed picture perfect. At home, however, there was trouble. Her father was overbearing and emotionally abusive. Her mother, while supportive, wasn't strong enough to stand up to her father. At school, Lis didn't have it easy either. She was bullied. But this all changed one day when Lis was invited to join the track and field team. After trying several of the different sports, Lis was identified as especially talented in the Javelin throw. With many hours of practice and numerous competitions, Lis also developed a circle of friends. The bullying stopped. With her new and growing confidence, Lis also found it easier standing up to her father. Things were looking up.

But things took a tragic turn one day. It was "Sports Day" at Lis' school and everyone was invited to participate. For track and field athletes, it was also an opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities. Medals were also being given. Lis was determined to get a gold medal in the Javelin throw. When her moment came, Lis got to her spot. She picked up her Javelin. Her best friend Sammy volunteered to mark the pitch where the Javelin would land. Lis wound up and "woosh" the Javelin flew.

But then, something went terribly wrong. The Javelin veered a little to the right. Sammy had her head turned away, seemingly distracted. Oh no! The Javelin was hurtling straight for her!... In a moment the Javelin struck Sammy in the head. She fell. There was blood everywhere. Lis witnessed the whole thing. The shock of what she saw made her fall to her knees, clutching her head in her hands. What had she done?!

If all this wasn't horrible enough, what happened next was even worse. Sammy was rushed to the hospital. They tried to save her... When Lis and her mom got to the hospital, they were told that Sammy hadn't made it. Wow! How awful! And even though Sammy's mother, devastated as she was, accepted that her daughter's death was an accident, many quickly began to see what happened as somehow Lis' fault. And even as the school was also declared responsible for not managing things in a safer way, Lis came to see what happened as primarily her fault. Police involvement only made Lis blame herself further. They questioned her and the way they questioned her seemed to suggest that maybe Lis and Sammy could have had some disagreement that could have led to Lis harbouring harmful intent. Can you believe it?! Poor Lis!

But there's even more. For Lis, having grown up in a strictly Catholic environment, the commandment "thou shalt not kill" did not allow room for "but I didn't mean it". And there

was no-one in spiritual authority who helped her understand that the same God who inspired moral commandments was also a God of love and forgiveness. So how, then, would Lis ever find some redemption past the massive guilt and self-blame? Sammy could never be restored to life. Could Lis find new life past all this?

Before we get to the rest of Lis' story, let's dive into our scripture readings for this Easter Sunday in search of revelatory guidance. Even though Easter Sunday is like the mountain-top of the gospel story, the whole concept of resurrection is profoundly misunderstood.

First of all, resurrection is not resuscitation or restoration as if we can somehow go back to the way things were before good Friday, before the cross or before any terrible tragedy, trauma or atrocity. Like Covid, like the attack on Ukraine, and like many things we pass through in life, we cannot just go back to the way things were. Resurrection, if at all possible or real, has to be a new life and a new way of life. We can't erase what's happened and it will always be a part of our memories, with consequences we'll have to work through for the rest of our lives.

Jesus died a horrible death. Jesus' death exposed the vast injustice of Roman law, the vicious hate of the religious authorities, the fear and cowardice of Jesus' closest disciples, and the complicity of the masses desperate for a messiah with expectations of revenge against enemies. How could any of that just get passed over and new life found as if it could all just be forgotten? The gospels are very intentional in describing Jesus' resurrection as not a restoration or resuscitation. His wounds are forever on his body as deep scars. But his body is also different and healed. The old is integrated into the new and transfigured in the process. But the old is never erased. It is always a part of whatever new life emerges.

And this leads to the second key point. Restoration or resuscitation has no place for integrating the cross of Good Friday. Resurrection, however, is about taking Good Friday, mixing it together with a fresh flow of faith, hope and love, and coming out with something new. Jesus is the same person and yet not the same, physically and spiritually. In his risen state, he has the ability to move here, there and everywhere, and yet he is physically human, with scars and all. Mary, like the disciples, don't recognize him at first. He is different. Something has changed. And yet when he reaches out to touch them with his healing and forgiving love, they recognize him.

So what is this new life called resurrection about, then? It's about the miraculous new possibilities of taking the good Friday losses, traumas, tragedies and perhaps, even, atrocities, and offering them up in the service of compassion, a justice that is not vengeance, and forgiveness. People who begin to experience spiritual resurrection well before they die, are enabled somehow to grow their compassion after their losses. Priorities change. Passions change. People have a desire to serve and care, to offer themselves to others who have passed through what they have passed through. The most profound healers are those who carry their

wounds and have somehow experienced how their wounds energize their capacity to care and endure in ways they would never have known before their Good Fridays. This is resurrection.

Resurrection is what the disciples of Jesus eventually experience too. From hiding in fear and shame after Jesus is arrested and crucified, having abandoned their lord, their Saviour and their friend, to boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to crowds of people even after being threatened by the authorities, and this just months after Jesus death... this is experiencing the resurrection. And this is also the case with Mary in our gospel reading and women in other gospel accounts. From massive grief and tears at the loss of Jesus, they emerge out of their fear and bewilderment, proclaiming the resurrection to the rest of the disciples... This is resurrection!

Proof of Easter Sunday, proof of the resurrection is not an after-you-die reality we must somehow persuade ourselves and others about. No. According to the gospels, resurrection begins now in a spiritual way even before we physically die. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a whole new movement. Following Jesus now is about opening ourselves to experience new life after we experience death while we live... There will be experiences we will all have to face, whether it's in the dying around us or our own personal crises, traumas and losses we'll need divine accompaniment to work through... Jesus is calling us to follow him through our dying to new life even as we live in our bodies. Easter Sunday is a call to experience new life now, even when the time comes that our bodies begin to fail us... Resurrection is an experience open to us all the way to our last moments of life...

OK, preacher, maybe some of us can relate to what your saying. Maybe we've seen this in people and maybe we've experienced something of it ourselves. We carry wounds and scars from life and yet love can find new and powerful ways to rise up in us. We can lose much that is precious in our lives and yet faith and hope can rise up quietly and sometimes fiercely in us too. But what does this look like for someone like Lis in your opening story?

Well, Lis was carrying a lot of guilt and shame for what she had done to her friend. In the 1980s, there was little counselling offered to young people experiencing inner trauma. So she lived with the guilt and shame for years. She could never hold on to personal relationships where any intimacy was involved. She could not share herself because it was too awful inside. At some point, though, Lis realized that she had to begin to help herself by helping others. She decided to begin finding ways of sharing her story. The only problem was that in sharing her story she began to relive the trauma of fresh memories all over again. She was experiencing new torment as her wounds, improperly healed, were bleeding again.

It was only after she began reading an important book: "*The Body Keeps the Score*" that she realised she was suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Even as she appeared outwardly competent, inwardly she was living in chaos. And so, she found her way to some important therapy for her mental health. She also found spirituality again, but unlike her strict

religious upbringing, which was big on judgement and small on compassion, she began to open her heart to forgiveness. She had to accept that she was forgiven so that she could forgive herself. And once she opened her heart to forgiveness, she also opened her heart to compassion – compassion for herself as a 13-year old girl who needed to be embraced not judged.

Since that time, Lis Cashin has written a self-help memoir entitled: "*This is me: My Journey to Mental Wellbeing*." She has also become a coach and speaker offering workshops on helping others who have passed through Good Fridays, guiding them to unlock their potential for resurrection by transfiguring their traumas and losses into meaningful and compassionate service in the world.

Now, some of us may not have had anything so traumatic as happened to Lis happen to us. But many of us have suffered losses of various kinds, including precious people in our lives. We've suffered setbacks with our health, and we have struggled through our relationships, our vocational journeys, our finances, our parenting, our mental health and many things besides. And certainly, the longer we live, the challenges will come as much as the joys. It's all a part of life. The question is: will Easter mean anything to us anew after we come to our Good Fridays? Will we find the spiritual resources and community to carry us through our Holy Saturdays, so that we build the kind of resilience and trust to open ourselves anew and work through our struggles until resurrection comes?

God is in our journey, whether we feel forsaken at times on our crosses, whether we feel the silence of Holy Saturday, uncertain what tomorrow will bring, but also in our special moments when we hear the proclamation anew in our hearts: Christ is risen; he is risen indeed! Hallelujah! God is in our journey if we have the eyes to see and a heart that is open. Will you open your heart anew to God's movement in you this Easter season?
Amen.