

Rebirth: “Ongoing Conversion”
“The Way And The Truth And The Life”
Proverbs 4:10-18
Psalm 119:9-32
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

Living out the gospel message in all areas of one’s life is important. Jesus’ death is not the end, but the beginning. Becoming and being a follower of Jesus did not end. Instead, becoming and being a follower of Jesus was expanded. Jesus being raised from the dead demonstrated that God made endless room for humanity to be in relationship with God. Yet, the disciples were disappointed. Jesus was gone...their friend and the very presence of God would no longer be with them. Their hearts were troubled. The inclusive reach of God into humanity was not enough to ease their pain.¹

Jesus being raised from the dead established a common ground for all humanity. Our hearts are troubled by many things. But they need not be. John Buchanan, now retired, was the long tenured Pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. He relates the following:

A friend of mine recently announced that he had lost hope for the human race. The news each day was so consistently and relentlessly depressing, he said, that he was certain that the human project had run its course. We might flail about for a few more centuries, but the end of civilization was in sight...And yet Easter comes. We believe that although bullies, thugs, and murderers seem to be winning, peace and justice will prevail at the end of the day. We dare to believe that the long arc of history, as Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, is toward freedom, equality, kindness, justice, and love²

¹The idea of God’s “roominess” was gleaned from reading Cynthia A. Jarvis in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 467.

²Adapted from John Buchanan’s article in the *Christian Century*, “Reason for Hope,” (April 1, 2015).

“What would free the human heart from being troubled?”³ We come to Jesus to know about the way, but Jesus says to us, “I am the way.” We come to Jesus to know about the truth, but Jesus says to us, “I am the truth.” We come to Jesus to know about the life, but Jesus says to us, “If you really want to discover and experience the way to life, hear my voice and walk toward me.” Looking to Jesus who is the way, and the truth, and the life in all circumstances, frees the troubled heart.⁴

Proverbs 4:10-18, Psalm 119:9-32, 1 Peter 2:2-10, and John 14:1-14 drives home that rebirth, the ongoing conversion is rooted in the way, and the truth, and the life, who is Jesus.

Jesus was raised from the dead for all humanity. Each person can have some aspect of their life raised from the dead. And that rebirth is ongoing conversion. **What are the answers to a troubled heart? First, the world promotes power and influence.** Power and influence are incapable of keeping the heart trouble free. The world rejects the word of God, and its answer of power and influence continues to trip people up and offers no lasting experience of peace but often creates an experience of deeper despair. **Second, Jesus offers one answer: he says, “Believe in God, believe also in me.”**⁵ No opposition, oppression, or rejection—not even death is as powerful as God’s determination to be with and to raise those who are faithful. Doing the works of love, compassion, and service for others calms the turbulence caused by self-reliance.

What troubled the disciples the most is that they miss Jesus. Courageous conversations and risk taking was the way Jesus engendered deepening faith and diminishing self-reliance. Jesus removed barriers and drew alongside the stranger. The way of Jesus was life-changing and

³The question is posed by Cynthia A. Jarvis in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, 467.

⁴Adapted from Jared E. Alcantara’s article in *Sunday’s Coming* email from the *Christian Century*, “From Observation to experience,” (May 7, 2023).

⁵John 14:1.

life-giving. Jesus had told the disciples that he would be with them always. Had they forgotten that? Staying close to Jesus calms the troubled heart.⁶

God has promised to love you unconditionally and always. God has promised to know you and be known by you. God has promised to make room for you with no strings attached.⁷ And Jesus calls you to participate in his movement of changing life for people, one person at a time. Yet, you must bank your hope on the One who loves you the most and knows you the best. Banking your hope on power and influence will not sustain you. Banking your hope on the resurrected Jesus will.

May the troubles of your heart be raised from the dead. Hear these words from Jesus in John 14:11-12,

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then or at least me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

Clearly, Jesus calls the church to recognize itself not as an end in and of itself, but as an instrument of God's mission. Might Geneva adjust its concentration, easing its focus on programs, budgets, members, and internal church life. Just maybe, we can build the engagement of each member and regular attender with people outside the church walls whom God may be intentionally bringing into each of our lives for God's purpose of building the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

⁶In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of David J. Schlafer, Bridgett A. Green, Rhodora E. Beaton, Jerry L. Sumney, Brian S. Powers, Philip Wingeier-Rayo, and Lindsay P. Armstrong as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 255-257, 257-259, 260-261, 262-264, 264-266, 267-269, and 269-270.

⁷I credit Cynthia A. Jarvis for introducing me to new language for embracing the inclusive, yet exclusive message of Jesus. See Cynthia A. Jarvis in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word, Year A*, 471.

Love wins. Death loses. Jesus was raised from the dead for you. He is with you always. Believe in God and also in Jesus. That way you know who you are and know that Jesus is with you all along the Journey. Remember, you come to Jesus to know about the way, but Jesus says to you, “I am the way.” You come to Jesus to know about the truth, but Jesus says to you, “I am the truth.” You come to Jesus to know about the life, but Jesus says to you, “If you really want to discover and experience the way to life, hear my voice and walk toward me.” Looking to Jesus who is the way, and the truth, and the life in all circumstances, frees the troubled heart. Jesus is calling your name. Walk toward him. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)
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