

“Wake Up, by Changing from Fear to Joyful Love”

Romans 8:6-11 & John 11:1-45

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Wake up, by changing from fear to joyful love. Jesus said. “I am the resurrection and the life.” There are at least four types of resurrection. Physical, after life on earth we journey through death resurrected to eternal life in heaven. Community, all discord between people will be forgiven, healed, resurrected uniting all people in loving community. Creation, all of creation groans for the perfection of the resurrected cosmos. Emotional, Spiritual, all of our fears, regrets, and suffering is resurrected into love, celebration and rejoicing.

Listen for resurrections in the Apostle Paul words. **Romans 8:6-11 NRSV “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to God. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, God who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through God's Spirit that dwells in you.**

Books have been written on what the Apostle Paul means by “flesh” and “Spirit”. I had an entire class on this in seminary. There may be an endless amount of insights that can flow from these words. However, for a few minutes let's simplify it down to “flesh” being “fear” and “Spirit” being “love”.

Listen again to the scripture with these substitutes. “To set the mind on fear is death, but to set the mind on love is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on fear is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who live in fear cannot please God. But you are not living in fear; you are living in love, since the love of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the love of Christ does not belong to God. But if Christ is in you, fear is being resurrected into love and life. If the love of God who raised Jesus from fear and death dwells in you, God who raised Christ from fear and death will give love and life to your mortal bodies also through God's love that dwells in you.

There is an enormous amount that is contained in the words fear and flesh. Some say that fear is the opposite of love. Others say fear is the root of all sin. Yoda said, “Fear is the path to the dark side...fear leads to anger...anger leads to hate...hate leads to suffering.” Fear of not having enough may lead to jealousy, hoarding, manipulating, and stealing. Fear of not being good enough may lead to a low self-esteem. Or, fear of not being good enough may lead to one cheating, lying, bragging, or putting others down. Fear of death may lead to difficulty living life. Fear of being alone may lead to being insincere, awkward, and promoting a false self.

No matter the party, fear is growing in our politics. Fear may lead to misunderstanding, to labeling, to demonizing, to hate, to excluding those who are different than those in power. Fear of scarcity may lead to shifting wealth, health care, housing, freedom, transportation to those in power, then to justify this behavior, to make those who are taking more than their fair share feel better, lies are told. Fear of a different point of view may lead to name calling, character assignation, and even murder. Naming the destruction that flows from fear could go on and on.

God desires love, abundant life, and joy. God is resurrecting all. God gives free will, so we on earth get to partner with God in resurrecting. Do not be afraid. Love all people. Speak the truth. Seek the truth. If a political speech, position, or action makes you fearful, sad, angry, stop, wake up, change from fear to joyful love. Think of a way you can respond to that situation with love. If you feed fear, it will grow rampant. Even a small seemingly insignificant act of love resurrects the situation. As one grows in love, God gives courage to love extravagantly perhaps befriending some who is different, perhaps donating time or money to an organization that seeks to love, shelter, cloth, educate and care for people, perhaps speaking up when a fearful lie is told by family, friends, co-worker, or anyone.

To set the mind on fear is death, but to set the mind on love is life and peace. We fill our lives with Jesus when we love. God loves everyone, so we are to love everyone. God is working through us to innovate our fear to zero, resurrecting abundant, joyful, life for every person and all of the cosmos.

Listen for resurrection in the *The Message* translation. **Romans 8:6-11 MSG** “Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what God is doing. And God isn’t pleased at being ignored. But if God has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of God. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won’t know what we’re talking about. But for you who welcome God, in whom God dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God’s terms. It stands to reason, doesn’t it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, God will do the same thing in you that God did in Jesus, bringing you alive to Godself? When God lives and breathes in you (and God does, as surely as God did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With God’s Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ’s!”

Return to life. Let go of fear. Let come love. Anthony de Mello wrote, “Put this program into action, a thousand times: identify the negative feelings in you; understand that they are in you, not in the world, not in external reality; do not see them as an essential part of “I”; these things come and go; understand that when you change, everything changes... Imagine that you’re unwell and in a foul mood, and they’re taking you through some lovely countryside. The landscape is beautiful but you’re not in the mood to see anything. A few days later you pass the same place and you say, “Good heavens, where was I that I didn’t notice all of this?” Everything becomes beautiful when you change. Or you look at the trees and the mountains through windows that are wet with rain from a storm, and everything looks blurred and shapeless. You want to go right out there and change these trees, change those mountains. Wait a minute, let’s examine your window. When the storm ceases and the rain stops, and you look out the window, you say, “Well, how different everything looks.” We see people and things not as they are, but as we are. That is why when two people look at something or someone, you get two different reactions. We see things and people not as they are, but as we are.”

Return to life. Let go of fear. Let come love. What do you feel worst about? A regret or misdeed or misfortune that darkens your thoughts and feelings. In this minute of silence identify your greatest fear. Let us pray. Imagine you are with Jesus at your favorite spot. Jesus is eager to take your fear, your burden from you. Imagine Jesus taking your fear. Imagine Jesus filling you with love. Amen.

Now that you are free from that burden What deed will you dare, what challenge will you accept, what act of generosity will you attempt knowing that you are beloved by God. In this minute of silence identify one new way you will love extravagantly. Let us pray Jesus thank you for being the resurrection and the life, for enabling us to love, for preserving every instant of love for us to savor for eternity. Amen.

Jesus resurrecting Lazarus gives us a foretaste of the variety of resurrections. **John 11:1-45 NRSV** “Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this, Jesus told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to Jesus, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your

sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in Jesus."

Thomas names our fear, our setting our minds on the flesh, our hopelessness, our fear that some aspects are beyond the resurrection of God. Thomas said, "Let us also go that we may die with Jesus."

Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life!" then asks each of us, "Do you believe this?" Do you believe that God does not destroy the fallen, the broken, the tarnished, the sinful, the incomplete? Do you believe God resurrects, transforms, changes, heals, lifts up, mends, makes glorious, turns fear into love, makes complete? God resurrects. God resurrects us physically. We will enjoy eternal life. God resurrects community. We will enjoy the uniqueness and beauty of all people as we all come together in perfect harmony. God resurrects creation. We will enjoy the magnificence of the entire cosmos. God resurrects us emotionally and spiritually. We will enjoy pure thoughts, joyful loving feelings, and our souls will soar. We are not dying, rather we are being born. We are being set free from all that imprisons and oppresses. Jesus personifies the ultimate victory of love. God provides other dimensions of resurrections beyond our grandest imagination.

The raising of Lazarus is a sign that God is the master of life and love, it is a sign of deeper realities, a sign of God's intent to fill all with joyful, loving life for eternity.

Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life!" Jesus says, "If you believe, you will see the glory of God?" Belief is a change of your thoughts, feelings and actions that enables you to grow in love, to rejoice in the glory of God. God is inviting you to wake up by changing from fear to joyful love. Amen