

It is not easy to see life through the lens of Jesus' resurrection, even for those who believe. I wonder if that is because we expect resurrection to be big, flashy, loud, and extravagant. Like so many marketing campaigns that promise whatever is being sold will change our lives for the better.

Or because we might think resurrection means starting over, like a video game, or going back to the beginning of a novel. But resurrection isn't going backward to what was. Resurrection is the Risen Jesus simply, quietly, intentionally walking out of the tomb into the world. It is transformation in the middle of life already in progress.

One of the best illustrations I've ever seen of resurrection is in the TV series *Good Omens*, which is based on one of my favorite novels with the same title. It's written by two friends, award winning authors Neil Gaiman and the late Terry Pratchett. The story pokes fun at institutions and religion while being very theological. It's about an angel and demon who develop a friendship over thousands of years of being on earth together. The plot is how these two unlikely friends try to foil the great war between heaven and hell, but the TV series has a subplot that highlights when they fail, that failure is not the end of the world because the world has already been saved. It is so subtle, it is easy to miss, like resurrection life.

When the series begins, the angel was nervous and anxious he messed up when the first man and woman ate the forbidden fruit and he sent them out of the Garden of Eden. He was afraid God was going to punish him. The demon, on the other hand, was confident to the point of arrogance in his role of tempting humanity. In a montage of different scenes, we see the angel and demon at different points in history. In one scene they watched Noah build the ark. The angel nervously observed from a distance while the demon criticized. The next scene showed the two at the foot of the cross as Jesus died. Both were sad, but again the demon was arrogant while the angel was nervously distant and apologetic.

Things changed between them, however, in the next scene which took place 8 years later, after Jesus' resurrection. The angel was no longer nervous nor anxious. He was playing a game and enjoying a drink at the ancient equivalent of a restaurant or coffee shop. The demon was there too, but he was no longer arrogant nor confident. He was sulking at a bar; sullen, grouchy, hunched over. For the first time in the montage, the angel initiated a conversation between

them because he's the happy one. From then on, the angel was actively involved in making life better for people and enjoyed the world. The demon came to realize it didn't really matter if they tempted people for good or ill, so they come up with a partnership that gave the other a rest once and a while.

This is a very subtle change. But it is substantial. It is small but has a significant impact; like the mustard seed Jesus talked about in a parable. The change is what makes the two characters grow as friends and grow to love the world and the people in it. The whole "whose side you are on" thing no longer mattered. Because God has redeemed the world through Jesus' resurrection, both the angel and demon were liberated from fitting into preconceived roles of good or evil and were free to love the world, each other, and people the way God does. They could stop trying to interfere and simply rest in God's love.

That is what resurrection life looks like. It is a change, but because it is smaller and more subtle than we expect, it is difficult to recognize when we encounter it still very much active in the world. Which is probably why the disciples in today's Gospel didn't recognize Jesus, even though he had already appeared to them twice before. This detail is interpreted by scholars and commentators that the disciples were too sad, confused, or traumatized to recognize Jesus after his resurrection, even after seeing him before. Another interpretation is this story didn't happen and was added later to convince the Christian community that produced John's Gospel to accept the hierarchical leadership of Peter instead of that of the Beloved Disciple. It's impossible to say for certain which is correct.

But even if those things are true, that doesn't mean it isn't a story of resurrection revealing itself in the midst of life. As my mother says of the story *Good Omens*, the Holy Spirit can use anything, especially something we love, to show us God's saving love in the world. That is how the Holy Spirit often works: through what we love.

There is a lot of love in today's Gospel. For starters, the disciples. Going through extraordinary events together will form friendships. And friendship is a form of love. These friends decided to go fishing together. Often, this is interpreted as they didn't know what else to do, so they did something familiar. That could be true. But maybe there was something more. Maybe fishing was something they loved to do. It seems they still had the equipment. When Jesus asked Peter if he loved him more than these, that question usually gets interpreted as Jesus asking Peter if he loved him more than the other disciples. But it could also be interpreted as Jesus asking Peter if he loved him more than he loved his boat, nets, and skills as a fisherman. Which could mean Peter loved fishing.

That the Risen Jesus appeared to the disciples doing something they love together is significant because they didn't recognize him when they first saw him. That pattern holds true every time the Risen Jesus shows up in the Gospels, no one recognizes him at first. Not Mary Magdalene, not the disciples in the upper room, not Thomas, not the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Maybe this isn't because the disciples were sad, maybe it is just because resurrection life is difficult to see. It wasn't until Jesus spoke or acted in the language of love – not that of passion, romance, power, control, violence, or money – but the love that makes a person feel seen and valued, that the Risen Jesus is recognized. When he called Mary by her name, when he broke bread, when he forgave his disciples and wished them peace and wholeness. In today's Gospel it was his knowing they hadn't caught any fish and suggested they cast nets on the other side of the boat and the fish filling the nets that opened the disciples' eyes and they recognized the Risen Jesus on the beach. He acted through something they loved: fishing together.

There is even more love in this story. My favorite is where Jesus had breakfast ready for the disciples when they got to the shore. It isn't mentioned, but I bet that breakfast of fish and bread cooked over an open fire on the beach was delicious. Because it tasted like love. It didn't have to be big, or expensive, or decadent, or served in an impressive restaurant to taste of love. All it takes is being prepared and served with that selfless beautiful love of the Risen Jesus. I hope you have had such meal.

That's a lot of love in today's Gospel. The love of each other, the love of fishing, the love of sharing a meal. And there is one more. The Risen Jesus had that strange conversation with Peter, asking him three times if Peter loved him. I'm sure you have heard the purpose of this conversation is Jesus forgiving Peter the three times he denied him. That's not a bad sermon that has its time and place. But maybe today the questions and answers about love can be something in addition to establishing Peter's forgiveness and leadership. Perhaps they can help us recognize resurrection life through what and who we love.

Resurrection life is not pragmatic. It reveals itself through love, not just the things of this world we love -- books, food, people, pets, cars, places, music, buildings, and such like. Resurrection is Jesus himself who embodied God's love in the world. Resurrection life isn't something that happens to the world, but in the world. It is part of the world. Which means it is relational. It isn't just receiving God's love. Resurrection is loving Jesus by loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

I hope you never forget God loves you more than you could ever imagine. Today's Gospel has the reminder this love is not one sided, it is an invitation to love God and participate in resurrection life here in this world, in this place and in this time. Resurrection life liberates us from having to conform to stereotypes or to always do something the way it has been done in the past. Resurrection life frees us to rest in God's love, which means we can change what we need to so that everyone, especially the vulnerable and often overlooked, has the opportunity to feel seen and valued and loved by God.

The world is big and full of so much to love. There is also a great deal of loneliness, suffering, exhaustion, and pain just as there is healing, joy, accomplishment, and success, as many OU graduates are celebrating this weekend. And in all of it there can be something that is not easy to see, but just because we might not see it at first, that doesn't mean it isn't there, waiting for us to look through the eyes of love. Even the disciples struggled to see it, but we can practice, like we practice other things, to look at life – all of life - through the love of Jesus for this small but important thing. And when we recognize resurrection life, we can invite others into it by helping them feel seen and valued and trust that no matter what, we can rest in God's lifegiving, redeeming love at work in the world.