

The words in today's passage from The Gospel of John seem a bit like stage directions in a film.

There is a cave on stage. Two people run forward. the first one stops, The other keeps going. Someone stands outside and looks in. The camera moves in for a close up. We see what they see: strips of linen and a cloth used to wrap a body after death are now separated from each other and laying a ways apart. If we use our imaginations, we can hear the soundtrack : sounds of bare feet running on dirt, lungs heaving from the effort, the birdsong of early morning and behind it all, the sound of a woman weeping. The physical details are what we are given because it's all we have: the set pieces, the location and some stage directions.

What is missing is what matters most. A miracle. Something that happened *between* the objects in space. Something that happened *between* the seconds in time that couldn't be captured on film or on modern day precision watches. The miracle is what matters most but it's something we can't physically hold onto, just as Mary Magdalene is told she can't hold onto to Jesus. She can't hold on to him but has to let him go and instead... *let the possibility of a miracle get a hold of her.*

And neither can we. We can't hold on to this miracle of the resurrection rationally. We have to let it go and in spite of our doubts, our fear of the unknown and our cynicism, **let the possibility of a miracle take ahold of us.**

Bestselling author Matt Haig once wrote about the simple act of reading:

*Reading isn't important because it helps to get you a job.
It's important because it gives you room to exist beyond the reality
you're given.*

A miracle does the same thing.

The resurrection of Jesus isn't important because it guarantees us real estate in heaven....what might that even mean? but it does give us room to exist beyond the reality we are given and that makes all the difference.

Alleluia Christ is risen

Ameen Mokdad is an Iraqi musician whose beautiful music I think I heard a number of years ago on NPR. I learned that Mokdad's home in Mosul had been raided by Isis and his many instruments destroyed as Isis cracked down on free expression the arts. Free artistic expression builds hope...*a room to exist beyond the reality we are given* and thus it is a threat to totalitarian regimes. Isis took it a torturous step further and threatened to slice Mokdad's fingers off *to bleed out the demon that made him want to make music in the first place.* Thankfully Ameen escaped or we wouldn't even know this story. And he hid in a cave in the mountains and continued to compose.

In some cultures making music may get you killed but apparently it also helps you survive, and gives you room to exist beyond the reality you're given and if you manage to share it with others (like this faith of ours that grows when we share it) it opens up a room of hope for others. Luckily, Mokdad was occasionally able to get his musical compositions to his uncle in Baghdad who sent them out into the world. And so, I heard one.

Finally, in 2017 when Iraqi forces liberated Mosul we heard from Ameen Mokdad again. A story from Reuters showed images of Mokdad played his

violin in the ruins of the city while bombs exploded in the background. If you search your memory, you may realize, you have seen it.

In 2018, Mokdad traveled out of Iraq for the first time to Turkey where he worked as a volunteer at a music camp for refugee children. At this festival his roommate was Kevin Bishop who is the director of the CT ensemble, Cuatro Puntos who are now featured artists in residence at our Episcopal cathedral in Hartford. Cuatro Puntos's mission, inspired in part by Kevin's continued relationship with Ameen, is to lift up musicians who have been underrepresented, silenced or persecuted. They are currently touring with powerful selections by Ukrainian composers.

Bishop and Mokdeen stayed in contact after returning home to CT and Iraq respectively. Eventually they began collaborating on an album of the 18 compositions that Ameen wrote while he was in hiding from Isis. Here was a collaboration that stretched across the world. Between two separated points on the globe more was happening than anyone could see and between two beats of Ameen's music was more time, more space, more suffering than we might be able to imagine. They tried for five years to get a visa approved to bring Mokdad to the US. Even a few months ago... it was impossible.

sigh

Tuesday morning, I went to the cathedral to reaffirm my vows and to pick up a year's supply of chrism and healing oils in a beautiful ceremony. (I'd like to share Bishop Jeff's sermon with you in the next enews. He's truly a breath of fresh air.)

I stopped back at my office on the way home, cherishing my many new bottles of oils and wondering about ways we might expand our healing ministry here at Holy Trinity (something available today in the side aisle during communion where Eric and Steve wait to pray with you and privately lift up any of your concerns.) I went upstairs, just *maybe* to see if Elisa could turn the music down... And there in the center of our parish hall was... Ameen Mokdad, smiling, entranced, sawing away at his violin with such passion and concentration while Kevin played the drums and around them swirled a blur of dancers, some of whom were crying.

Resurrection is usually announced with Easter lilies, the sound of trumpets, bright streaming light. But in truth it did not happen that way. It began in a cave in darkness, after torture and death. New life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a song in the heart, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb. It starts in the dark.

From the far star points of his pinned extremities,
cold inched in—black ice and squid ink—
till the hung flesh was empty.
Lonely in that void even for pain,
he missed his splintered feet,
the human stare buried in his face.
He ached for two hands made of meat
he could reach to the end of.

In the corpse's core, the stone fist
 of his heart began to bang
 on the stiff chest's door, and breath spilled
 back into that battered shape. **Now**
it's your limbs he comes to fill, as warm water
shatters at birth, rivering every way.

That's a poem called Descending Theology: The Resurrection
 by Mary Karr.

Jesus came alive again **for us**. That **we** might live again:
 Throw off our shackles. Live through our terrors. Escape our delusions of
 perfection and control. And ironically by acknowledging our
vulnerability, our dependence on God and each other, accessing the true
 source of our power to change this world. We too are children of God.

And I wonder:
 If we accepted our TRUE identity as Jesus did
 In Galilee, in the garden and on the cross.
 What would there be to be afraid of?

If we accepted our true identity as Jesus did
 Who and what might we be willing to heal?

If we accepted our true identity as Jesus did
 What new pathways of connection and communication might we
 initiate across the world?

If we accepted our true identity as Jesus did
What acts of resistance and justice might we feel compelled to take on?

If we accepted our true identity as Jesus did
Why wouldn't we try, I mean REALLY try to save the world?

The resurrection of Jesus gives us room to exist beyond the reality we've
been given. The wait is over. The battle is won. Let's begin.

Alleluia Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!