**Resurrection Transforms Doubt**

Easter 2, April 24, 2022

John 20: 19-31

This week we started the next book for our Craft/Study group, My Grandmothers’ Hands, Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to mending our Hearts and Bodies. It is about the trauma we carry in our bodies, getting in touch with it and healing from it. It is specifically about trauma from anti-black racism and white supremacy, that effects all of us regardless of our racial background. In the first chapter, the author, Resmaa Menakem identifies some things to acknowledge before we continue reading. He writes:

* “Trauma is as ancient as human beings. In fact, it’s more ancient. Animals that were here eons before humans appeared also experience trauma in their bodies.
* Oppression, enslavement, and fear of the other are as old, and as widespread, as human civilization.
* A variety of forms of supremacy – of one group being elevated above another – have existed around the world for millennia and still exist today. Multiple forms of supremacy often intersect and compound each other, harming human beings in profoundly negative ways.
* Race is an invention – and a relatively modern one…
* White body supremacy in America doesn’t just harm Black people. It damages everyone. Historically, it has also been especially brutal toward native Americans, and, often, Latino Americans.
* As we’ll see, while white body supremacy benefits white Americans in some ways, it also does great harm to white bodies, hearts, and psyches.”

In reading the above I found myself questioning my belief that humans are inherently good. Thinking about the oppression and suffering we have and continue to inflict on one another from the beginning of time, caused me to doubt, in that moment, that humanity is a blessing.

It is this kind of oppression and supremacy that led to Jesus’ traumatic and violent death on the cross. It is for this reason that the disciples, at the beginning of our reading from John today, are locked behind closed doors, for fear of the Jews as it reads in most translations. Even this expression of John, or the translation that renders this statement, ‘fear of the Jews’, has led to even more oppression over the years following and fed into anti-semitism. The reality was that it was the Judean authorities, the Jewish Elite rulers and the Roman system, the Empire, that they were afraid of. The actual Greek word used here, means the Jewish political, economic and religious establishment that had seemingly eliminated Jesus. In the midst of this fear, Jesus appears among them, and says “Peace be with you” and also sends them out as God had sent him. He opens the door for them to carry on, to overcome their fears, and to continue to share God’s love as he did. In the context of his violent death and suffering, he comes and offers Peace. In the midst of their despair, and anger, and betrayal Jesus comes and offers Peace, and forgiveness and sends them out. The Christ offers a different response to what has happened than what might have been expected or what most humans would have done. There is no anger, or expression of retaliation, only peace and love.

Thomas missed out on all of this, so when he hears the news that Jesus appeared to them he doesn’t believe it. He doubts. Thomas gets a bad rap as a doubter, because when you look at the whole story, all the disciples doubted. They were just told by Mary that Jesus was alive and appeared to her, but they didn’t believe her. They doubted and stayed locked in fear behind closed doors. Jesus meets Thomas’ doubt with grace. He doesn’t challenge Thomas, but embraces his doubt, confronting it head on. In the end, while Jesus tells Thomas to touch the wounds on his had and side, there is not indication in the text that Thomas actually does. Just the response, an affirmation of faith – ‘My Lord and my God!’. Doubt leads to deeper faith.

This is the premise of Brian McLaren’s book, Faith after Doubt that our Craft/Study group finished before Easter. In it, McLaren outlines four stages of faith and doubt that we go through as part of our faith journey. The first stage is Simplicity. This is a dualistic stage that focuses on right and wrong. Right belief is what is important and following authority. It assumes everything is known and knowable and Faith requires assent to beliefs. Some people never come out of this stage and it works for them. Too often though, something happens which shakes or questions our faith, or a belief in the system which causes us to doubt and we move to the next stage.

The next stage is Complexity which is pragmatic and focuses on success or failure. Achieving goals and being successful is important and it assumes everything is doable. Faith in this stage is viewed as a means to a desired end. Exploration and options to choose from with regard to faith perspectives is also key in this stage. When folk in this stage become disillusioned or begin to question whether the ends being achieved by the group, are the wrong ones, then they begin to move to the next stage. Brian writes: “the quest for honesty and depth burns like a fire in the belly and baptizes people into Stage three”

Stage three is Perplexity which is critical and relativistic, focusing on honest, authentic experience or dishonest, inauthentic experience. It works on seeing through appearances to reality, being authentic and true to oneself. It assumes everyone has an opinion, and every viewpoint is a view from a point. There is more than one way to see things. Faith can be seen as an obstacle to critical thinking and there is a value for doubt – questioning and challenging the status quo are encouraged. God is often viewed as myth or mystery in this stage. The honesty and authenticity can be hard to find in a faith community. For ministers who find themselves in Stage Three, they often feel unable to preach their beliefs to communities of faith that are in Stage One and Two, for fear of losing their job. It can feel like a descent into a dark tunnel without knowing a way to get out. It is like Jesus’ descent to death, which we know does lead to resurrection, but when you are in it, you can’t see it or a way out of it. Eventually one comes to place of realizing that there is more that we don’t know than we know, and McLaren writes we are “being pulled through all of the simplicities and complexities and perplexities of faith toward this one treasure, this one pearl of great price, this one thing that truly matters: Love. Faith was about love all along. We just didn’t realize it, and it took doubt to help us see it.”

The fourth stage is Harmony which is integral and holistic. It focuses on inclusion and transcendence and understands the connection of everything, seeing things whole and making a contribution. It assumes we are all connected and part of a greater whole. God is a loving presence, creative wisdom, in everything, and known through experience and metaphor. In this stage, faith is a humble, reverent openness to mystery that expresses itself in non-discriminatory love. Doubt is viewed as a necessary part of life, a portal to pass from one stage to another.

So, as I prepared for this message today, and read about Jesus’ appearance with the disciples who then offers peace in the midst of the grief, anger, and despair they were feeling, my doubt shifted and my faith in humanity began to return. In spite of all Jesus had been through, he finds a way to offer peace and love not only to the community of the disciples but through them to the powers of oppression that killed him. He calls us to the same love and compassion. To offer peace to one another. To offer peace to the Russian aggressors. To offer peace to those we disagree with. To find peace within a system that harms our bodies. To find peace with one another. There is hope, in love, in resurrection. Love is stronger than fear, than death, than our inhumanity against one another. Jesus said, Peace be with you, as God sent me, so I send you. Go forth in love, in peace to serve the world. Amen.